

JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, not me. Jedipilot24 created the plotline to this series, he kindly let me revive it.

Jedipilot24 created the Harry Black series, which was an AU version of the Harry Potter stories in which Harry was raised by Sirius. He recently scrapped the series due to lack of interest, so he kindly let me revive and revamp it.

## The Story of Harry Potter-Black

### Chapter 1

#### The Boy-Who-Was-Kidnapped... Or Not

Sirius Black was flying his motorcycle as fast as it would go, hoping against hope that he wasn't too late. He had originally set out to check up on Peter's hiding place. But when Pettigrew was nowhere to be seen, Sirius assumed the worst and started flying towards Godric's Hollow. His fears had been confirmed when he felt the Fidelius charm collapse while he was still halfway there. When he got there, Sirius landed and saw a giant figure with a bundle in his arms.

"Hagrid?" the smaller man asked.

"Sirius." The giant said.

"Is that Harry?"

"Yes. Little tyke somehow survived with nought except this scar." Sirius looked at Harry's forehead to see a lightning shaped scar.

"Give him to me, Hagrid. I am his godfather - Lily and James asked me to take care of him if something ever happened to them."

"Sorry, Sirius, but I have orders from Professor Dumbledore himself. He is going to take Harry to his Muggle relatives."

"No! Hagrid, do you have any idea what they are like? They hate magic and they hate our kind. They will kill him! In fact, I specifically remember Lily and James writing in their will that the Dursleys are not to get custody of Harry under any circumstances." Hagrid shook his head.

"Dumbledore told me to bring him Harry and I will do so."

Sirius immediately hatched a plan and did his best to look sorrowful. He did not like having to do this to Hagrid, but he was not about to let Harry be raised by his magic-hating relatives. Sirius knew that Hagrid owed Dumbledore a lot and was willing to do anything for him.

"Could I at least hold Harry for a moment to say goodbye to him?" Hagrid's face softened. How could he not grant him that one wish?

"Of course" he said and handed Harry to him. The instant he did so, Sirius Apparated away, leaving behind a startled and upset Hagrid. Sirius had been taking a huge risk, Apparating with a baby. Unfortunately, he had no choice. When he arrived at one of his smaller houses, he quickly walked in and summoned the house-elf.

"I need you to take care of Harry for a few hours while I deal with a few things."

"Binky will be more than happy to take care of little Master Harry," the house-elf said and Sirius walked back outside and Apparated to Diagon Alley where he went to Gringotts and found Griphook, the Goblin who took care of the Potter accounts. After telling him what had happened, Griphook nodded.

"I'll put their wills into effect. I presume you already have Master Potter in your care." Sirius nodded

"Yes, I need you to lock down the Black, Potter, and Gryffindor vaults. Keep the regular deposits into Harry's trust vault, but that is all. No one accesses them except for Harry and me and even then, only in person and in writing." Griphook nodded and he continued, "Also, there is a chance Dumbledore might have gotten his hands on the keys to the vaults. Can you retrieve all copies of the keys and change them, please?"

Griphook clicked his fingers and on the table in front of them, twelve keys appeared. The first four were for Sirius' vault, the second four were for the Potter vault and the final four were for the Gryffindor vaults. Griphook clicked his fingers again and the keys instantly changed. Sirius took two of each key.

"Can Harry and I trust you to keep the rest of the keys safe, old friend?" asked Sirius.

"Of course. My father and his father have served the Potters for centuries and I will continue to serve them."

"I also want to formally adopt Harry, just to be safe." Griphook nodded again and gave him the paperwork. Sirius filled it out. Harry James Potter was now Harry James Potter-Black.

"Are you serious?" Dumbledore asked, with fury in his voice. Hagrid was reporting to Dumbledore in his office at Hogwarts.

"I'm afraid so, Professor. I had no idea that Sirius was going to do that," Hagrid replied.

"It's OK Hagrid – you didn't know. Did you know Sirius Black is the reason James and Lily are dead?"

"What?" Hagrid was confused.

"He was their Secret-Keeper." Hagrid began to wail then began to get into a rage.

"I can't believe that I gave little Harry to that traitor! As soon as I get my hands on him, I'll....."

"We'll find him, don't worry," Dumbledore said, trying to reassure Hagrid.

Peter Pettigrew was walking through an alley when he was startled to hear a familiar voice say "Hello, Peter." Pettigrew whirled to see Sirius Black pointing his wand at him.

"S-Sirius?" he stammered. "What's going on?"

"You know what's going on. How could you betray Lily and James?" Pettigrew swallowed and pulled out a wand. They began duelling. It was not long before the Aurors showed up. Pettigrew saw his chance and shouted, "He betrayed Lily and James."

"Liar."

Pettigrew then used the only non verbal spell he had ever mastered - Cornat Timar. There was a large explosion accompanied by smoke and dust. Pettigrew cut off his finger, changed into a rat, and ran into the sewer. The smoke cleared and when the Aurors saw Pettigrew's finger, they advanced on Sirius.

"Sirius Black, you are under arrest for the murders of Lily and James Potter and Peter Pettigrew and the kidnapping of Harry Potter."

"You fools!" Sirius scowled and Apparated back to his house.

Dumbledore arrived at Gringotts and walked up to the main desk. Griphook greeted him.

"What can I do for you, Professor?" he asked.

"Sirius Black betrayed James and Lily Potter and because of it, they are dead. You are to grant me full unrestricted access to the Potter and Gryffindor vaults." Dumbledore said, not knowing he no longer had his copies of the keys.

"I was warned about this, Professor," Griphook replied, "Both the Potter and Gryffindor vaults are on lock-down. Neither can be accessed until further notice."

Dumbledore stormed out of the bank. "Blast – foiled. OK, I'll wait until Harry goes to school."

Almost ten years later

Harry Potter-Black woke up at promptly 6 o'clock in the morning. After spending an hour meditating, 30 minutes for Occlumency and 30 minutes for his Animagus training, he took a shower, got dressed, and walked downstairs just in time to see Binky starting on breakfast. Sirius and Remus walked down several minutes later.

"Good morning, pup." said Sirius.

"Good morning, dad, Uncle Remus." Remus Lupin wasn't really his uncle, but he was the next best thing. Just then, an owl flew in and dropped a letter on the table. It was addressed to Harry.

"It's my letter from Hogwarts. How is that possible?"

"The letters are magically written. It doesn't matter if you have been declared Missing and presumed dead," Remus said. They enjoyed a good laugh at this, for Harry had been declared that after a five week, fruitless manhunt by the Ministry and the Order, "As long as you aren't officially declared dead, they will be sent out."

"Wonder what they'll think when I show up with the name of the person who supposedly killed my parents?" They laughed again and then Sirius sobered.

"If you ever see Pettigrew..."

"I know what to do, dad. You've said this to me a thousand times now," Harry replied as he rolled his eyes. "I just wish I could have a go at him."

After he had eaten, Harry scrunched up his face in concentration and suddenly his hair was blonde and very neat, his eyes became blue, and his facial structure shifted slightly. His scar was now only noticeable if you knew where to look for it. Harry had worked with his cousin Tonks to develop their Metamorphmagus abilities. Sirius put some glamour's on to make him look like an older version of Harry's disguise.

Harry grabbed some floo powder and threw it on the fire. He then stepped in and said

"Diagon Alley."

Sirius followed him several seconds later.

They walked into Gringotts and were quickly greeted by Griphook, who by now was familiar with their usual disguises. The goblin took Harry to the vault containing his trust fund. After filling his money bag, they went to the various shops. At the trunk store, Harry got the most expensive one, with seven magically expanded compartments, anti-theft and anti-loss charms, and could shrink down to the size of a matchbox. After getting his cauldron, potions supplies, robes, telescope, and other things, they went to Flourish and Bott's. Harry's eyes were immediately captured by Curses and Countercurses (Bewitch Your Friends and Befuddle your Enemies with the Latest

Revenge: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs, Tongue-Tying and Much, Much, More) by Professor Vindictus Viridian. Sirius smiled.

"Okay, I'll let you get that, just promise that you'll only use them in self-defence."

"Of course," Harry said, looking offended.

They got a few other 'extra-curricular' books in addition to the school list. As they walked to Ollivander's, they went past Quality Quidditch Supplies.

"Too bad first years aren't allowed their own brooms," Harry sighed as he gave the Nimbus 2000 a hungry look. Sirius smiled again and shook his head.

"You really are your father's son," he said. "Tell you what, I'll get you an owl while you're looking at wands." Harry nodded and they went separate ways. Harry entered Ollivander's and waited patiently as the wand maker measured his arm and gave him a series of wands, all of which were rejected.

"Tricky customer, I see," he said as Harry laid down yet another rejected wand. After going through what seemed like half the supply, Ollivander finally handed him "eleven inches, Holly and Phoenix feather, supple." Harry flicked it and red and gold sparks shot out the end.

"Curious," Ollivander said.

"What?"

"I remember every wand I ever sold. The phoenix whose feather is in your wand, gave another feather. Just one. And that feather was in You-Know-Who's wand."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Interesting."

"Indeed it is," Ollivander said, "Indeed it is." He paused for a moment. "Will that be all?"

"I also want your best wand care kit and holster."

"Of course," he said and handed him the requested items. After Harry had paid, he walked out to see Sirius holding a cage with a snowy white owl. Harry smiled

"Thank you, dad."

"What are you going to name her?"

Harry thought for a moment before replying, "Hedwig."

Please review, with thanks to my betas

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AN: There has been some concern that I have been plagurising these files from zeropolis79 which is not true because I used to be known as zeropolis79.

Thanks to all those who gave kind words..

## Chapter 2

### Hoggy Warty Hogwarts

The rest of the summer flew by. Harry studied his schoolbooks and continued the other training Sirius had put him through. He had insisted that the heir of the Black family be a gentleman and so had had him tutored in fencing, etiquette, several languages, including French, Spanish, and Italian. And then there was his daily exercise that he was somehow expected to continue at Hogwarts. Tonks told him all about what he could expect at Hogwarts.

"Watch out for Snape," she said, "He's the Potions Master and also the Head of Slytherin house. He always shows favouritism towards them and Dumbledore doesn't care. You're probably going to be in Gryffindor like me, which will only make it worse. Especially since a N.E.W.T. in Potions is essential for becoming an Auror."

Harry nodded. Tonks was about to start her training to be an Auror and Harry had been eager to become one ever since he was five years old. He made a mental note to study extra hard in Potions.

"Not only that," Sirius said, "But Snape is likely to have a grudge against you."

"Why?"

"Because of your father. He saved Snape's life from a prank when we were students. This means that he owed your father a life-debt, which was transferred to you when he died. And let's just say that James and Snape were rivals."

"Ahh...I see."



Sirius appeared to want to say something else but quickly decided against it. If I tell him that, he'll probably strangle Snape the moment he sees him. Though I would love to see Snivellus get what he deserves, he can't go around killing teachers. I'll tell him when he's older.

On the day before he left, Sirius gave him some jokes he had bought from Gambol and Japes the previous day and gave him the Marauder prank notes.

"Have to carry on the tradition. You have to find three people to become the new Marauders. Your dad would hate it if you went through Hogwarts without pulling pranks while your mother would want you to do well in class," Sirius said. "We also had a special map of Hogwarts but I don't know where it is now, but the last I heard of it, it was in Filch's office."

"Too bad I'm not a bird...or look like Mrs. Norris." Tonks had told him about the caretaker's cat. She and Filch were after Sirius and Remus' time. They chuckled at this.

Harry had just stepped onto Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The Hogwarts Express was nearly ready to leave. He saw a family of red heads and heard:

"Blown up a toilet? We've never blown up a toilet." one of the boys said.

"Great idea though. Thanks, Mum," said another who looked exactly alike him.

"It's not funny. And look after Ron," the mother said.

"Don't worry; 'ickle Ronnikins is safe with us."

"Shut up," said a boy he assumed to be Ron. He was almost as tall as the twins.

Harry smiled. The two red-haired twins looked like they might make good accomplices for his pranking. They could be two of the new Marauders. As Harry made plans to become friends with those two, he stepped onto the train and found a compartment. After about a minute, the twins and the youngest red head walked in.

"Anyone sitting in here?" one of the twins asked. Harry shook his head and they sat down.

"I'm Fred," one of the twins said, "And this good-looking bloke is George. Oh, the runt is 'iccle Ronnikins." Ron glared scathingly at Fred.

"I'm Harry Black," the boy-who-lived said, deciding that it would be best to hide who he really was as long as possible.

"Nice to meet you, Harry," Fred said.

"Likewise," he said and then leaned in conspiratorially, "I couldn't but help notice you talking about blowing up a toilet. Would you like help in that area?"

Fred and George exchanged looks and then gave him an appraising look.

"And what would you know about pranking?"

"Ever heard of the Marauders?"

"Who hasn't?" Fred said and produced a spare bit of old parchment. Harry's eyes bulged out for a moment, and he quickly grabbed the map.

"Hey..." Fred began.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," Harry said and smiled when he read.

Welcome oh noble son of Prongs!

Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs,

Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers

are proud to present

The Marauder's Map

"Your dad was Prongs!" Fred said and Harry nodded.

"And my godfather is Padfoot and my 'uncle' is Moony."

"Wow!" Fred.

"What about Wormtail?" George added

"Wormtail...well it's a long story but suffice it to say, we don't like him anymore."

Harry said, "Mischief managed," and the map closed. "May I keep this, please?"

"Of course. We've already memorised it but we will probably ask if we can borrow it at some point," Fred said.

George added, "Anyway, we have to go now, Lee Jordan has a giant tarantula he wants to show us." Ron winced and the twins left.

"Great, just great," Ron said.

"What, Ron?"

"They're bad enough as it is, but now that Hogwarts are going to get a new set of Marauders, it's going to be absolutely unbearable."

"Oh come on. The Marauders only pranked those who deserved it. Fred and George seem to be cut from the same cloth and so am I. Those two will be perfect Marauders."

"They turned my teddy bear into a spider when I was a baby," Ron said with resent in his voice.

"And given that you are still complaining about it, you no doubt deserved it." Ron opened his mouth to reply when a round-faced boy sauntered in.

"I'm Neville Longbottom," he said as if he expected everyone to already know that. Ron gaped and said.

"I'm Ron Weasley; please sit down." Neville gave a brief smile and sat down next to Ron. Harry merely shook his head. Looks I'm going to have a lot of fun.

"I'm Harry Black."

"Black?" Neville crinkled his nose "I heard the Blacks are a nothing more than a bunch of dark wizards."

"Yes, we are. Would you care for a demonstration?" he said with completely straight face. Though it was true that the Blacks were known for their dark wizards, Sirius and he were exceptions.

Neville and Ron's eyes went wide and they began squirming. This time, Harry couldn't refrain from laughing. Sirius and Remus had showed him the spell books in the library at Grimmauld Place so that he would know what he was up against if he ever had to fight a dark wizard. Harry wondered for a moment if he was capable of actually using those spells before quickly shelving the thought. They would be ashamed of me! Sirius said that my dad absolutely despised anyone who used the dark arts.

Just then, the compartment door opened to reveal a girl with bushy brown hair, brown eyes and rather large front teeth. "May I sit here, please?" Harry nodded. Ron and Neville said nothing and she sat down next to Harry and held out her hand.

"I'm Hermione Granger," she said in a bossy sort of tone.

"Harry Black," he replied. "So, tell me about yourself," He said, deliberately ignoring Neville and Ron's glares.

"My parents are dentists. I really didn't know what to make of all my 'accidents' until Professor McGonagall showed up and told me I was a witch. Naturally, I was a little sceptical at first, but then she made something fly around the room and..." Hermione shrugged and he nodded.

"Do you have any idea what house you are going to be in?" Harry asked.

"I like Gryffindor, but Ravenclaw also seems nice since it's supposed to be where all the smart students go."

"I'm probably going to be in Gryffindor. My parents were in it too and these things tend to run in families."

Ron and Neville gave Harry a strange look but he ignored it. They only knew that the Black family had been in Slytherin for centuries. The compartment door opened again revealing a pale-faced boy flanked by two fat boys, who were obviously his bodyguards.

"Well...what do we have here? I'm Malfoy, Draco Malfoy." Ron sniggered.

"Something funny about my name?" Malfoy asked, "Red hair, freckles, hand-me-down robes...you're a Weasley."

"And you're just a Death Eater in training," Harry calmly said.

"And just who do you think you are?" Malfoy snapped.

"Harry Black," he said, "I believe, in the pureblood hierarchy, the Blacks are well above the Malfoys. Am I right?" Harry smiled, concealing the fact that he was actually half-blood. He could have some fun here. Malfoy swallowed. Not only did the Black Family date clear back to the Middle Ages, but their collection of dark arts spell-books dated back even further, long before the Malfoys.

"I-I'm sorry. I did not know," Malfoy stammered and beat a hasty retreat.

Harry chuckled and sat back. Hermione looked at him curiously and he shrugged.

"Don't worry, Hermione," he said. "I don't buy all that pureblood garbage. I just had to put that ponce in his place before he spouted all that rubbish about the purebloods and it was either that or hex him into oblivion, which would hardly be a good way to start out the school year. Don't you agree?"

Hermione nodded. "That would've been very bad." She paused for a moment. "Could you have hexed him?"

"Sure," Harry casually said, "Not only have I already memorized my school books, but I got a few more for extra reading." Ron and Neville shook their heads in disgust. Hermione's eyes went wide.

Never before had she known someone else to memorise all the school books, let alone buy extra ones.

"Really? I love reading, too."

The lunch trolley came by. Harry offered to buy Hermione sweets but she said, "No thank you; my parents wouldn't approve." Harry shrugged and got a few Chocolate Frogs for himself. His first one was Dumbledore.

The Sorting Hat finished singing and the whole hall burst into applause. McGonagall began calling out the names of the first years. Hermione and Neville were both sorted into Gryffindor. No one was surprised when Malfoy went into Slytherin.

"Potter-Black, Harry" McGonagall called out. There was dead silence in the Great Hall for a moment and then the whispers and murmurs began. Most of them said to their friends that they had heard Sirius Black had murdered Harry while other rumours stated that Sirius was teaching Harry to embrace the Dark Arts. Harry ignored them and resolutely strode towards the hat and put it on.

Hmm...difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. A sharp mind, yes. There's talent and a nice thirst to prove yourself...what do I see...oh you are very cunning and determined. If only I could sort you into every house. Which do you want? Gryffindor? Are you sure? You would do well in Slytherin. You could be great and Slytherin would help you on the way, no doubt about that."

"Not Slytherin!"

"Oh, all right. If you're sure... "GRYFFINDOR!"

The Gryffindor table erupted into cheers. The Weasley twins began shouting, "We got Potter. We got Potter!" Harry took the hat off, walked over to the Gryffindor table and sat down next to Hermione.

Several minutes later, after Ron was also sorted into Gryffindor, the feast began. As they ate, Hermione said, "You never told us you were Harry Potter."

"Yeah," Fred said, "I feel cheated."

"I never saw the reason to. Besides, I wanted to befriend people who actually liked me, rather than just because I'm famous."

"Understandable," George said. "So, you've been raised and adopted by Sirius Black. Did you know that he..."

"Did not betray my parents. That was Peter Pettigrew."

"Pettigrew is dead," Fred said.

"I highly doubt that," Harry replied and suddenly made eye contact with Professor Quirrell.

A sharp, hot pain shot across his scar. Harry reflexively raised his Occlumency shields and the pain started to dull. What the hell was that? He wondered before resuming his eating, making a note to keep an eye on Quirrell.

When everyone had finished eating, Dumbledore stood to make some announcements.

"First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well," he said, his twinkling eyes flashing in the direction of the Weasley twins.

"I have also been asked by the caretaker, Mr. Filch, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors."

Harry rolled his eyes at this.

"Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch. And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

Harry laughed, one a very few who did.

After they had sung the school song, Dumbledore dismissed them. Percy stood up and led the Gryffindor first years to the portrait of the Fat Lady.

"Password?"

"Caput Draconis." The portrait swung aside and they stepped into the common room.

Percy pointed out the boys and girls sets of stairs and warned them not to try to mix. Harry started up the stairs but paused when McGonagall came tearing into the common room.

"Mr. Potter."

"Yes, Professor?"

"Professor Dumbledore wishes to see you immediately."

Harry wondered at what he had done but then remembered what Sirius had told him about Dumbledore wanting to leave him with his Muggle relatives and he might try to send him there. Better get this over with, he thought before following her through the corridors to a gargoye.

"Lemon drop," McGonagall said and the gargoye got up and walked aside.

McGonagall led Harry up the stairs and down a corridor to a door. Harry walked in and was greeted by Dumbledore.

"Hello, Harry," the headmaster said with a twinkle in his eyes that caused Harry to strengthen his Occlumency shields.

"Hello, Professor," he said, deciding to play dumb, "Why did you call me here?"

"I must tell you that Sirius Black betrayed your parents to Voldemort."

"Really?" Harry said. "The way he tells it, it was Peter Pettigrew."

"How convenient to blame a dead man." Harry felt something collide with his shields and strengthened them even more.

"Sir, I really doubt that he is dead. The way Sirius tells it, Peter practically admitted it before the Aurors arrived but when they did



arrive, he conveniently said that Sirius caused my parent's deaths. Sirius swears that after the explosion, he saw Peter."

Dumbledore mused on things for a moment. "Still, I must get you to a much safer environment. I will see if I can have Minister Fudge revoke his guardianship of you and I can send you to your Muggle relatives."

"No!" Harry declared. Dumbledore merely twinkled his eyes even more.

"I know that's what you may think now, but soon you will thank me for it."

It was taking all his self-control to keep his temper.

"Where is Sirius?" Dumbledore asked and Harry again felt something collide with his shields. They buckled and nearly collapsed.

"I don't know, sir," Dumbledore shrugged.

"Of course not, he must have been very careful not to tell you so wouldn't try to escape."

"Sir, you have given me a great deal to think about," Harry said, with gritted teeth, "In the meantime, please refrain from trying to rape my mind in future." Dumbledore ignored the young man's last remark.

"Then you may go back to the common room. Care for a lemon drop?" Harry shook his head and quickly left. You bastard! He thought as he walked back to Gryffindor tower. You manipulating, conniving, goat-fucking bastard! Harry walked into his dormitory and saw Ron, Neville, Dean, and Seamus waiting for him.

"Well?" Neville asked

"Well, what?" Harry said, unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"What happened? What did you do to get summoned before Dumbledore when classes haven't even begun yet?"

"He just wanted to tell me a few things and make sure that I was alright. After, all I was raised by Sirius Black," Harry said, testing the waters.

There were looks of commiseration and sympathy among all of them, but especially Neville and Ron. Harry would've loved to keep a low profile, but his fame made that impossible. Oh, well, he thought and fell asleep.

Please review, with thanks to my beta witowsmp

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This is a revival of Jedipilot's Harry Black series but with improvements and new material.

## Chapter Three

### Classes

Harry woke up and meditated for longer than normal. He knew that he had only survived his encounter with Dumbledore the previous day because the headmaster had not been expecting him to know Occlumency, and because Sirius had had him practicing it for as long as he could remember. Now, he knew why. Harry opened his eyes and wrote a letter to Sirius, explaining what had happened. He then looked up and immediately spied a rat on Ron's bed. This was a rat that Sirius and Remus had shown him countless times in a Pensieve.

The first year Gryffindors had Transfiguration later that day. They had been asked to bring their pets. Harry brought Hedwig with him while Ron had brought his rat.

Harry sat next to Hermione, who of course didn't have a pet to bring to class.

McGonagall began her lecture on transfiguring animals into objects when Harry raised his hand.

"What is it, Mr. Potter?" she asked.

"Professor, is there a way to force an Animagus back into their human form?" he asked. He had a plan in mind and this was the best place to carry it out, especially seeing there were dozens of witnesses.

"Why do you ask, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall asked.

"I read about them, having an interest in becoming one myself at some point, but the book I read never said anything about forcing one in their animal form to return to their human form in case of emergencies," Harry answered. "I thought I'd ask you about it

because it is a form of transfiguration and I'm told you are the best person to ask about it." Harry had chosen his words well.

"Very well, Mr. Potter. I will demonstrate the spell, although it won't do anything," McGonagall said.

"May I suggest Ron's pet, Professor? It is a small creature so it shouldn't hurt."

McGonagall took Ron's rat and held it out by its tail. She pointed her wand at it and cast a spell. She was the first to show surprise when everyone saw the rat transform before their eyes.

The creature grew in size and became human. The person's features resembled that of a rat, as if the person had been in that form for years. McGonagall looked at the man in shock, recognising him.

"Peter Pettigrew!" she shouted.

"It can't be!" one person shouted.

"Sirius Black killed him!" another person shouted.

For once, Professor McGonagall was silent. She was shocked. She, like everyone else in the Wizarding world, had believed him to be dead. Before anyone could do anything, Pettigrew transformed back into a rat and ran off.

McGonagall had dismissed the class early. Hermione was walking with Harry.

"You knew what was going to happen, didn't you?"

"I suspected something like it. Sirius had shown me memories of Pettigrew in his rat form and Ron's rat looked just like him."

"Why didn't you say anything?" Hermione asked.

"I couldn't prove anything. If I went to Dumbledore or McGonagall and said to them, I believe Peter Pettigrew is here at Hogwarts as someone's pet, they would think I was going mad."

Harry willed himself to ignore the stares he was receiving, especially Neville's look of undiluted jealousy. "If you don't want to hang out with me, that's alright," Harry said to Hermione.

Hermione sighed. "Harry, there's no one I would rather hang out with. You're the only one I can really count as a friend." Harry's eyes went wide and everything he did was a forced movement.

The very next day, Harry got a reply from Sirius. Harry had written to him first thing that morning telling him about Dumbledore's attempts at using Occlumency on him.

Dear Little Prongs,

I can't believe that he would stoop to that level! This only confirms what I already suspect about him. Whatever you do, Harry, steer clear of him. Don't let yourself owe him anything because he'll just use that to get to you, and through you, me.

Padfoot

In Defence Against the Dark Arts, Harry's initial suspicion of Quirrel only intensified when he saw how incompetent Quirrel seemed to be. On Friday, he got a letter from Hagrid.

Dear Harry,

I know you have Fridays off, so would you like to come by my house for a cup of tea? I need to speak with you about something.

Hagrid

Harry wrote back.

Sure, I'll be there.

Harry

He gave the letter to Hedwig as well as a piece of bacon and she hooted happily before flying out.

"Potter!" Snape said in Potions. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

"A sleeping potion so powerful it is called the Draught of the Living Death, sir." Snape looked a little shocked but continued.

"Where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

"The stomach of a goat, sir. It can protect you from most poisons." Snape's shock increased. He never expected Harry to be able to answer these questions.

"What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?" Harry smiled. He had learned this information years ago. It was one of the benefits of living with a werewolf.

"They're the same plant and it's also called aconite," Harry calmly replied as he met Snape's gaze without blinking.

"Longbottom!" Snape suddenly said, "What are Jobberknoll feathers used for?"

"I-I don't know." Snape gave a wicked smile.

"Apparently, fame isn't everything, after all. What are the effects of Re'em blood when drunken?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Dare I even ask what a boomslang is?"

"I don't know, sir?"

"Pathetic, absolutely pathetic. You think that just because you weren't tortured for some reason and because Dumbledore took you under his wing, that you are somehow special?"

Longbottom swallowed. "N-No, sir."

"Jobberknoll parts are used in memory potions and truth serums, Re'em blood gives its drinker immense strength and a boomslang is a very poisonous African snake," Snape said.

As the lesson progressed, Neville's incompetence was revealed even more as he spilled the cauldron and got soaked in his

incorrectly made potion, which caused angry red boils to spring up all over his arms and legs.

"Idiot, boy!" Snape said as he cleared the spoiled potion with a flick of his wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?"

Neville whimpered.

"Take him to the hospital wing," Snape spat at Seamus and turned to Harry and Hermione who had been working next to Neville.

"Potter, why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought to make him look like an even bigger fool to puff up your own image? Five points from Gryffindor." Harry clenched his teeth and balled his fists. He knew that Snape wanted to make him argue, but that would only make things worse.

That afternoon, Harry and Hermione knocked on Hagrid's door. Hagrid opened it and let them in.

"I want to say, Harry, that I'm so sorry."

"For what?"

"I'm the reason Sirius Black took you."

"And I'm supposed to be upset about that?"

"He betrayed your parents?"

"No, that was Peter Pettigrew. How many times do I have to say it? Haven't you heard about what happened in class the other day?" Harry practically shouted.

Hagrid thought about things for a moment. "I believe you, Harry," he said after a while.

He noticed a clipping from the Daily Prophet concerning a recent attempt to break into Gringotts. The interesting thing about it was that the vault in question had been emptied earlier in the day. The very same day that he and Sirius had gone to buy their school

supplies. Odd, he thought, Very odd. Why would Hagrid keep this clipping...unless he was somehow involved?

Harry really doubted that Hagrid was the one who broke in for the simple reason that it would've taken magic far more powerful than he was capable of doing. Not to mention the fact that he probably doesn't have the brains to attempt something like that. Hagrid wasn't the one who broke in. But what if he's the one who emptied the vault?

Now that he thought about it, he had seen Hagrid at Gringotts that day, though he hadn't known who he was at the time and had thought nothing of it until now. I wonder what was in it. Whatever it is must have been very valuable for someone to try to break into Gringotts. Harry made a mental note to look into it later and glanced at Hermione who seemed to be thinking the same thing.

"What did you do to Scabbers?" Ron demanded that evening.

"I didn't do anything. It's not my fault he turned out to be an unregistered Animagus..." Ron cut him off with a punch in the face and soon they were brawling on the floor.

Hermione stepped into the common room and said in a shocked voice, "Stop that now before Percy gets here!"

"He arranged for that just to embarrass me!" Ron said as they stood up.

"I did not!"

"Harry?" Hermione said.

"You saw McGonagall's reaction. Pettigrew is an illegal Animagus!"

"How do you know? Did Sirius Black tell you? He killed your parents then Pettigrew!" Ron shouted.

"Sirius is innocent of all charges!" Harry said, stomping out of the common room. Hermione followed him.

"Can you prove it?" she asked. Harry took a photo out of his pocket. It was of the Marauders transforming into their animal forms.



"It's useless now that Pettigrew's gone," Harry replied. "More than likely, he's gone off to find some other pure-blood family like the Malfoys..."

"Just tell me, Harry," Hermione said in an impatient tone.

Harry sighed and poured out the story. Neither he nor Hermione noticed Professor Quirrell eavesdropping...or that he had a rat in his hand.

Finally, Hermione said, "Why didn't you tell me this earlier? Or go to McGonagall?"

"Because neither she nor anyone else would've believed me. Not when they think that Sirius is a murderer and a kidnapper."

"And he is," a new voice said. Harry and Hermione turned to see Minister Fudge and Dumbledore.

"Come on, Harry," Fudge said as if talking to a favoured nephew. "Tell us where Sirius is, I promise I won't let him hurt you."

"Sirius would rather die than hurt me!"

"Harry," Fudge said, "I know this is probably going to be hard to accept, after all he's raised you all these years, but Black is a criminal who deserves the Dementor's kiss. Even if he didn't kill Peter Pettigrew, he did betray your parents to their death."

"No!" Harry shouted, starting to loose his temper again and Fudge merely smiled

"As I said, it's going to be hard to accept..."

"And you can go to hell as far as I am concerned!" Harry said and felt a charm collide against his Occlumency shields and, as before, absorbed it.

"Harry, calm down," Dumbledore said in his best grandfather tone, "And tell me where he is." Harry forced his temper back down and regained his normal aloofness.

"He never told me where we were," Harry said in a stupid, bored tone. Dumbledore seemed satisfied and nodded.

"We should've known," he said before he and Fudge walked off, shaking their heads in disappointment and muttering something about, "checking Black's houses." Harry started to run back towards Gryffindor Tower when Hermione grabbed him.

"What was that all about, Harry?" Hermione asked

"Let's just say, Dumbledore isn't what he seems to be." Harry looked around and then whispered into her ear, "But Sirius taught me how to protect my mind from external influence."

"Can you teach me?"

"Probably," Harry said. "So you believe me, now?"

"After seeing what just happened, I'm starting to, yes."

Harry pulled out a mirror and said "Snuffles." Sirius's face instantly appeared in the mirror.

"Hello, Harry; how are things at school, and who is this pretty girl?" The bushy-haired girl blushed.

"This is Hermione. And things at school aren't going good at all," Harry said and told him about his conversation with Dumbledore and Fudge.

"You're right, this is very bad. I will find a certain hiding place. I think you know which one I'm talking about?" Harry nodded and he continued, "Andromeda's invited you to spend Christmas with her, Ted and Nymph. Have you found the rat?"

"Yes and no."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I had him within my grasp. I managed to trick McGonagall into exposing him, but before anyone could do anything, he transformed back and made a run for it, probably to one of the

families." Sirius nodded in understanding. "I'm sorry; I should've been more direct..."

"Don't blame yourself, Harry. I was direct when I went after him ten years ago and look what almost happened."

Harry took a deep breath and nodded. After several more minutes of discussing classes and introducing Hermione properly, Harry put the mirror away.

By the following day, Malfoy was back to his normal, bullying self. Whether it was because he had discovered the truth about Harry or simply a matter of social recovery (either that or he got his mother, being a Black, to tell him about the family), Harry did not know. Nor did he really care as he now had an excuse to start pranking him.

Their first flying lesson was at 3:30 that afternoon. As Madam Hooch was telling them to do a gentle take off, Hermione, full of nerves, took off. She went crazy on the broom. Without thinking, Harry got onto his broom and took off. Scared, Hermione flew upside down and in panic, let go of her broom. Harry flew to her and grabbed her hand. With great difficulty, he managed to get back to the ground. He dropped Hermione onto the ground (she only fell a couple of inches) so he could land.

"HARRY POTTER!" Professor McGonagall's loud voice shouted.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, not me.

This is a revival of Jedipilot's Harry Black series but with improvements and new material.

AN: Again, thank you all for the kind words and support. I never realised this series was so popular. I liked the series when Jedipilot was writing it but was dismayed when he gave in during Goblet of Fire. So, I thought I'd ask if he minded me taking over and reviving, which he allowed.

A few people had questions about Neville. Dumbledore manipulated and moulded him into the spoiled brat he is in this story. He also put a revulsion charm on him designed to make him hate Harry. I'm afraid Neville will never be a good guy in this fic. But don't worry, Neville will be a good guy in my other stuff.

## Chapter Four

### The Long Game

Harry was expecting to get expelled, or at the very least detention. Instead, McGonagall took him and introduced him to Oliver Wood, Captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, and then announced that she had found a new Seeker for Gryffindor. To say that Harry was shocked would be an understatement. Wood, however, seemed impressed by what McGonagall told him about Harry's flying abilities.

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore about bending the first years rule," McGonagall said and Harry's smile disappeared and he went as white as sheet. Oh damn! I've really done it this time!

"Is something wrong, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall asked and Harry quickly shook his head

"No; nothing," he said. They gave him a strange look and then shrugged.

"You're the Seeker!" Hermione said. They were in a deserted corridor. "But first years aren't allowed."

"Unless they get permission from the Headmaster."

"What are...oh no!" She exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, that's what it's looking like," Harry said and pulled out his mirror. "Snuffles." Sirius's face appeared and smiled.

"How are things going, Harry?"

"I have good news and bad news."

"Well, let's hear it."

"The good news is that I've been selected to be the Seeker for the Gryffindor team."

"You what? How?" Harry related the incident and Sirius frowned.

"I take it that that's the bad news?"

"Yeah. Are you still safe?"

"Yes, and I will continue to remain here until I am sure that I can return."

"You know that I'm going to have to give up the address of one of your houses..."

"And you don't know which ones they haven't searched?" Harry nodded "Well you don't have to. Just give him one of the unused addresses, and as long as he doesn't penetrate your shields, he'll think that I've gone into hiding if nothing turns up."

Harry took a deep breath and nodded, "Alright; I'll do that. Keep your fingers crossed."

"I will. Talk to you later," Sirius's face faded and Harry put the mirror away and turned back to Hermione.

"I really should start teaching you Occlumency and Legilimency. And," he looked around and leaned in closer and whispered "How to become an Animagus." Hermione's eyes went wide

"You're an Animagus? I've read about them and it's supposed to be a very complex procedure."

"I know. I haven't mastered the transformation yet. The only reason I'm as far as I am is because I was raised by one." He stopped when Dumbledore came around the corner.

"Harry, I need to talk with you in private." Harry nodded and followed him to an empty classroom.

"I hear Professor McGonagall really wants you to be Gryffindor's new Seeker. I can make that happen, but..." There was a twinkle in Dumbledore's eyes and he entered Harry's mind. Harry knew what he was searching for and projected the appropriate false memories. It was helped by the fact that they were based on real ones. Dumbledore's face turned sour when he saw the addresses – damn! Already searched!

"Did you say something, Professor?" Harry asked, trying to play dumb.

"Yes, I'm afraid that I cannot grant her request. First years have not been permitted on the team since my predecessor and I'm afraid I can't make an exception for you, even if you are the Boy-Who-Lived. If I allowed you on the team, I would have to let other first years try out for their house teams."

"I understand, Professor," Harry said, knowing that Dumbledore was refusing his request because he hadn't got what he wanted. The headmaster excused his student who then went to find Hermione. He told her what had happened and she nodded.

"You really have to teach me that," she said.

Harry and Hermione stepped into the Gryffindor common room and were met with stares and murmurs.

"What happened, Potter?" Neville asked eagerly. "Did you get expelled?"

"No," Harry said and hid a smile.

"So, what happened?" Dean asked "What punishment did you get?"

"I didn't get one. In fact, Professor McGonagall tried to convince Dumbledore to let me be the Gryffindor Seeker," Harry smoothly lied, knowing that they couldn't handle the truth. He then wandlessly cast one of the charms that Sirius had taught him. Neville suddenly let out a massive fart and the other Gryffindors began laughing at him, making Neville turn an interesting shade of red. Even Hermione was cracking up at him and a thoroughly humiliated Neville ran upstairs.

That night, at dinner, Malfoy challenged Harry to a wizard's duel at midnight in the trophy room. Hermione, to Harry's great surprise, volunteered to be his second. And so, that night, Harry and Hermione snuck out of the common room. They then proceeded to the trophy room and waited impatiently. Midnight struck and Malfoy was nowhere in sight. Suddenly they heard a noise in the next room.

"Sniff around, my sweet. They might be lurking in a corner," said the voice of Argus Filch. Harry and Hermione ran like they'd never run before down the Charms corridor where they had an encounter with Peeves the Poltergeist, who began yelling,

"STUDENTS OUT OF BED! STUDENTS OUT OF BED DOWN THE CHARMS CORRIDOR!"

At the end of the corridor was a locked door. Hermione pointed her wand at it and whispered "Alohomora!" The lock clicked and the door swung open. They went in, shut the door, and pressed their ears to it. Peeves, apparently had a change of heart about getting them into trouble and told off Filch. Harry breathed a sigh of relief and turned to see a corridor. The third floor corridor. And now they knew why it was forbidden because they were staring into the eyes of a monstrous three-headed dog, which began growling. Harry backed up and groped for the doorknob. They fell back and Harry slammed it shut. The duo began running and didn't stop until they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady, who fortunately had returned.

"Where on earth have you been?" she asked.

"Never mind that, pig snout!" Harry said. The portrait swung open and they scrambled into the common room and collapsed into the chairs.

Hermione, who had gotten both her breath and her temper back, said "Didn't you see what it was standing on?"

"I noticed something." Harry said..

"There was a trap door," Hermione said, glaring at him. "Obviously, it's guarding something. "I'm going to bed!" she said, stomping up the stairs.

On the way to breakfast the following morning, Harry was stopped by Professor McGonagall who took him into an empty classroom.

"I saw what happened with you and the Headmaster yesterday Potter. I don't think it is right for him to deny students stuff because he can't get his own way. He of all people should know that only a Secret Keeper can reveal any secrets kept under Fidelius. I spoke to the school Governors last night and they have decided to go over Dumbledore's head and have given you permission to join the Gryffindor Quidditch Team."

"Thank you Professor." Harry said.

"You're welcome Potter. Now I want to see you do well – I would like to see that trophy in my office at the end of the year."

Malfoy was quite surprised to see that Harry and Hermione were alive and still in school at breakfast. Harry began speculating in his spare time just what the dog might be guarding. 'It must be very valuable,' he thought and remembered the newspaper clipping in Hagrid's hut. What do they say? The only place safer than Gringotts is Hogwarts? Harry was now almost positive that Hagrid had emptied the vault that day and that whatever had been in it was now being guarded by that three headed dog. However, neither he nor Hermione had any idea as to what it might be.

Just then, the Great Hall was flooded with owls. A bevy of them dropped a bundle in front of Harry along with a two notes. Harry opened them first.

Dear Pup,

This is your new broom, have fun and beat Slytherin. Make sure you get plenty of memories to show Nymphadora, Moony and me.

Padfoot



PS: Don't tell dear Dora I wrote her first name on this letter. She'll use me for Auror target practice.

The second letter read,

Dear Harry,

Oliver Wood will meet you tonight on the Quidditch field at seven o'clock for your first training session. Try not to advertise the fact that you have a broom or everyone else will also want one.

Professor McGonagall

Harry did not open the package until he was in his dormitory and smiled when he saw that it was a Nimbus 2000. Harry gleefully ran his hands over the slim handle. It was just begging to be flown.

When seven o'clock neared, Harry went down to the field and began flying around the goal posts and up and down the field. The Nimbus moved at his slightest touch and he had never been this happy before. A voice interrupted him,

"Hey, Potter, come down," Oliver said and Harry gently flew down and landed next to him.

"Very nice," he said with a glint in his eyes, "I can see what McGonagall meant. You really are a natural." Wood then began explaining Quidditch. Harry calmly listened, even though he already knew the rules. After that, they began practicing with golf balls. Harry caught every single one and Wood seemed proud.

"That Quidditch cup will have our name on it this year for sure," he said. "I would not be surprised if you turned out better than Charlie Weasley. He could've played for England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons."

The weeks flew by. Hermione made quick progress in Occlumency, Legilimency and Animagus practice, and though she hadn't quite caught up to Harry, she wasn't very far behind either. Neville and Ron became Harry's new targets for pranks, though Draco didn't exactly get much of a respite either. One night, Harry pulled out the

Marauder's Map and said, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

The map took shape and Harry's eyes went wide when he saw Peter Pettigrew right next to Professor Quirrel.

What the hell? He thought, 'Why would Pettigrew go to Quirrel...unless Quirrel was a Death Eater.' But that didn't make sense since Snape was also an ex-Death Eater.

Harry made his way out of the Tower and towards Quirrell's room. It was locked and the Alohomora charm did not work against it. Disheartened, Harry went back to bed.

Halloween came a lot sooner than he would've liked. So far, Pettigrew hadn't left Quirrell's room and the professor renewed the locking charm on it fairly often. In charms that day, they learned the flying charm. Harry ended up partnered with Seamus Finnegan, who was a fairly decent fellow despite hanging out with Neville a little too much. Hermione, however, was paired with Ron, who was failing miserably at the charm. Hermione tried to help him

"You're saying it wrong," she snapped "It's Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the 'gar' nice and long."

"You do it then," Ron snarled, "if you're so clever."

"Fine," Hermione rolled up her sleeves, "Wingardium Leviosa." The feather rose off the desk and hovered about four feet above their heads.

"Oh, well done!" cried Professor Flitwick as he clapped "Everyone look, Miss. Granger's done it." Harry gave her a smile and then said, "Wingardium Leviosa."

His feather floated up to join Hermione's and Flitwick was impressed.

"Well done, Mr. Black." Flitwick said and Harry's eyes went wide. Most people called him Potter not Black, as if they were trying to ignore the fact that he had been raised by Sirius. He wondered why Flitwick was different in this regard.

"Well done," Flitwick continued, "Five points for Gryffindor."

After the bell rang, Harry stayed behind and told Hermione that he would be along shortly.

"What is it, Harry?" Flitwick asked.

"I want to know, just out of curiosity, why called me Black instead of Potter," he began. "Everyone else calls me Potter and pretends that Sirius doesn't exist. Drives me nuts, really, but there doesn't seem to be much I can do about that right now."

Flitwick smiled at him and said, "The reason I called you Black is because I was the one who performed the Fidelius Charm on your parents, which means that I know that Sirius is innocent. I tried to convince Dumbledore and the Ministry of it, but they wouldn't listen. They told me that if I persisted in rumour mongering, I would find myself in Azkaban with Sirius."

Harry began thinking for a moment and decided that he could trust Flitwick.

"What if I told you that Pettigrew was in the castle at this very moment," he said.

"What do you mean?" Flitwick asked "Pettigrew is dead. Sirius killed him."

"I wish, believe me. But, unfortunately, no. Pettigrew, you see, is an illegal Animagus. His form is a rat."

"And how would you know that?" Flitwick asked.

"Because Sirius, Lupin and my father helped him become one," Harry said. "Did you hear about the incident where Pettigrew was forced out of his Animagus form in Transfiguration?"

"I heard of the incident but the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall denied it happened. There are a few rumours that the memory of the incident was Obliviated from students, so I'd be careful."

"Ever heard of the Marauders?" he asked and when Flitwick nodded, he pulled out the map.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." He said. When the map formed, Flitwick was astonished to see Pettigrew in Quirrell's room.

"I do not understand," he said.

"Neither do I," Harry said. "You wouldn't happen to know if he was a Death Eater during the war?"

"No," Flitwick said. "He wasn't."

"Well this just gets more and more complicated," Harry sighed. "I've tried getting into Quirrell's room but apparently it's sealed with more than your basic Locking Charm."

Flitwick didn't know what to think of this. On the one hand, even trying to break into a teacher's room was enough for a week of detention. On the other hand, Harry was trying to bring a criminal and traitor to justice.

"I shall tell Professor Dumbledore at once," Flitwick said.

"Good luck," Harry said and went off to the Halloween feast. Hermione was nowhere to be seen. Harry asked Parvati where she was and she said that Ron had insulted Hermione and that she was in the girl's bathroom, crying and added that she wanted to be left alone. Harry started to get up just as Professor Quirrel came sprinting into the Great Hall.

"Troll...in the dungeons....just thought you should know..." he said before fainting. Harry eyed him suspiciously, ignoring the uproar. Dumbledore called for the prefects to lead their houses back to the dormitories. Harry realized that Hermione did not know about the troll and snuck away from the other first years when Percy wasn't looking. As he made his way to the girls' bathroom, Harry had to hide behind a stone griffin from Snape.

What is he doing here? Harry abruptly realized that Snape was heading in the general direction of the third floor corridor. This is just getting more and more tangled.

Harry reached the bathroom just in time to see the troll go in. 'Hermione!' He thought and ran in after it, closing the door behind him.

"Hey, retard!" he yelled out. The troll heard his voice and turned to head towards him. Harry said the first spell that came to his mind.

"Wingardium Leviosa."

The troll's club flew out of his hand, rose high in the air and then suddenly dropped onto the troll's head. It fell to the ground with a thud that shook the entire room. Harry put his wand away and grabbed Hermione.

"Is it dead?" Hermione asked.

"Probably not," Harry replied. "We have to get out of here, now," he said just as they heard footsteps. Professor McGonagall furiously burst into the bathroom.

"What on earth were you thinking of?" she said. "You were lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you in your dormitory?"

"I realized that Hermione did not know about the troll," Harry said, "and so I came looking for her. I found the troll about to attack her and used the flying charm to knock the brute out with his own club." McGonagall, for a moment, did not know what to say. Finally she said "10 points to Gryffindor for your outstanding courage, loyalty, and level headedness." She paused for a moment. "Now, I suggest that you two return to your dormitory."

Harry nodded and led Hermione away.

"I want to say," Hermione said, "Thank you for coming after me."

"Hey, what are friends for?" he replied, "Why did you let Ron get to you?"

"I don't know," she said, "I guess that Ron can do that to you."

"Yeah, he is a git," Harry agreed.

November came, bitter and cold. Harry's pranks on Malfoy and Neville increased. Every day, the two boys could be found making noises from one animal or another and letting out massive farts at all the worst times. And that didn't even take into account the twins, who merrily transfigured Malfoy's robes into a pink tutu one fine morning and then made him start dancing ballet right there in the Great Hall, at least until Snape ruined the fun by dragging the boy back to the Slytherin dormitories.

To make things even better, for Harry anyway, none of his pranks were ever tied to him because of his Metamorphmagus abilities. The downside of this was that they ended up being blamed on the twins, who in turn, pranked Harry 'as payback' they said. Harry didn't mind all that much as he'd take one of Fred and Georges pranks over punishment any day of the week.

Flitwick, unfortunately, hadn't convinced Dumbledore about Pettigrew. And so, since he couldn't go after Pettigrew (teachers, after all, had certain appearances to maintain) Flitwick began privately tutoring Harry and Hermione in more advanced unlocking charms. Hermione was also steadily improved in Occlumency and Legilimency; she was now at Harry's level. Their Animagus training was also progressing, though it was much slower work.

As the first Quidditch game neared, Harry's suspicions towards Snape began increasing as the Potions Master seemed to have developed a limp. On the day before the match, Harry used the Marauder's Map to find Snape in the staffroom. He saw Filch bandaging Snape, who said something about the impossibility of 'keeping an eye on all three heads at once.' Harry started to close the door, but not before Snape had seen him. Harry still did not know how he had escaped without punishment, but he had realized one thing. Snape had tried to get past the dog on Halloween and he told Hermione.

Their suspicions grew even more when Hermione caught Snape trying to jinx Harry's broom. She stopped him by setting fire to his robes with her specialty blue-bell flames. However, when they presented their suspicions to Hagrid, he tried to reassure them that Snape was not after whatever it is, though he let slip the name of the dog, Fluffy, and another name – Nicholas Flamel. Flitwick, similarly, did not think that Snape was after the mysterious object. When

asked about Nicholas Flamel, Flitwick became evasive and told Harry to forget about it.

November turned into December and Christmas approached. And still, Harry and Hermione had not uncovered the identity of Nicholas Flamel, despite all their research in the library. They were so busy that Malfoy and Neville even got respites from Harry's incessant pranks. Harry could not go home for Christmas because Sirius was still in hiding. On Christmas Morning, Harry woke up to see a small pile of presents at the foot of his bed and began opening them. Hermione had gone home to be with her parents over Christmas and there were very few others left in the dormitory. Sirius gave him some pranks from Gambol and Japes while the twins gave him stuff from Zonko's. Remus gave him supplies for the Animagus potion that he would have to brew very soon. Harry smiled when he saw that there was enough for two people. Tonks gave Harry some new books to encourage and aid his ambition to become an Auror. Hermione gave Harry some Chocolate Frogs.

Harry went downstairs and saw Neville about to open a present. Harry was shocked when he saw the writing: This rightfully belongs to Harry Potter, but you deserve it far more than he does. Use it well. A friend

Harry, in the flash of a second, reached out and grabbed the present.

"Hey, that's mine..." Neville whined.

"Can you read, you idiot? It says here that it rightfully belongs to me."

"But it was given to me!" Neville said.

"And I really don't give a damn," Harry replied, raising his wand. "Give me an excuse, please." Neville whimpered and ran back up to the dormitory. Harry tore open the present revealing a fluid, silvery grey cloak. An invisibility cloak! He thought and then remembered Sirius and Remus telling him about his father owning one. They hadn't known what had happened to it and had thought that it was destroyed along with the house in Godric's Hollow.

Apparently not! Harry thought and then his mind began working. Of course! It has to be Dumbledore. He must have taken it prior to my

parent's death. Why, I'm not sure...Harry made a mental note to ask the Headmaster about this later.

That night, Harry used his Invisibility cloak to enter the Restricted Section of the Library. After very nearly getting caught by Filch and Snape, Harry took refuge in a room and found himself facing a mirror. A mirror in which he saw far more than just his reflection.

Please review, with thanks to my beta witowsmp



JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, not me. Jedipilot24 created the plotline to this series, he kindly let me revive it.

Here's the final chapter – I would like to thank everyone for all their kind words, especially with my beta witowsmp for putting up with all this. Work on the next story is in progress.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusions

"Mum, Dad?" Harry said and the two reflections nodded and smiled. Harry did not know how long he had stood in the room, staring at his smiling parents, but he finally managed to tear himself away and go back to his dormitory.

The next night, he went back to the room. The mirror was still there, still showing him his parents.

"I see you have discovered the Mirror of Erised," a new voice said. Harry turned to see Dumbledore.

"I take it you have figured out its purpose by now," he said and Harry nodded.

"It shows us our deepest desire," Dumbledore nodded and smiled, his eyes twinkling away. "Many have wasted away in front of the Mirror of Erised or gone mad. The Mirror will be moved to a different spot in a few days," he said. "Do not go looking for it again. Best not to dwell on dreams or you will lose touch with reality and forget to live."

"I disagree, Professor," Harry said.

"Oh?" Dumbledore said with a touch of amusement.

"Yes," Harry said. "It's our dreams which drive us...motivate us to excel. Without dreams, we would have no reason to do anything beyond the minimum."

"Perhaps," Dumbledore conceded, "But some dreams remain dreams and dwelling on them is dangerous."

Harry was forced to admit that Dumbledore had a point. There was a slight pause.

"I am interested, Professor, in knowing why you tried to give a certain something to a certain undeserving person," Harry asked and Dumbledore, for a moment, looked surprised and concerned.

"Take some advice, Professor," he continued, "And don't try to do something like that again." Harry turned and walked out of the room without looking back. As he turned a corner, the cloak caught on a statue, forcing Harry to become visible. He looked at it and noticed it was snagged on the statue. Before he could do anything about it, he could hear footsteps. Not wanting to risk detention or loss of points, he ran off before Snape came in the area. In the morning, Harry went back to collect the cloak and found out it had gone.

The next semester began and Harry and Hermione were no closer to uncovering the identity of Nicholas Flamel, though Harry was certain that he'd seen the name somewhere before. He told her about the mirror and his conversation with Dumbledore.

"I wonder what I would've seen?" she wondered.

"Knowing you," Harry said "You'd probably see 12 O's on your N.E.W.T's along with a Head Girl badge on your robes." Hermione chuckled at this. Harry sat down on a couch and opened one of the Chocolate Frogs Hermione had given him. When he saw that the card was Dumbledore, it was like a light going on in his brain.

"Of course!" he said.

"What?" Hermione asked and gasped when she read the card. "That's it, I know where to find him!" she said and ran upstairs. Several minutes later, she came back down with a thick book.

"I checked this out of the library weeks ago for some light reading," she said and began paging through it. Harry hid a smile at what Hermione thought of 'light reading.' Finally, she reached the page and began reading.

"Nicholas Flamel is the only known maker of the Philosopher's Stone," she said.

"The what?" Harry asked and Hermione shoved the book in his face. Harry read the indicated passage and his eyes nearly popped out.

"That must be what Fluffy is guarding," Harry exclaimed.

"Yes," Hermione said. "They must have known that someone was after it and since they're friends..."

"Flamel asked Dumbledore to safeguard the Stone in the only place more secure than Gringotts...Hogwarts," Harry said and Hermione nodded with a smile.

Harry then showed her his potion ingredients and Hermione took him to the girl's bathroom on the second floor where he was introduced to a rather temperamental teenage ghost named Moaning Myrtle, who haunted one of the toilets there. "We can make the potion here," Hermione said. "No one ever comes in here anyway."

"Perfect," Harry replied.

"Potion." Myrtle asked, "What potion?"

"Animagus," Harry said and Myrtle giggled

"Like father like son, I see," she said. "He and his friends made their potions in here, too." Harry smiled and opened the book.

"Let's see...we're still going to need fluxweed picked at the full moon...so it should be ready in two months."

At Quidditch practice, Wood revealed that Snape was referring their next game. Harry and Hermione were horrified at this and redoubled their efforts to learn new spells. The training with Flitwick was going slow, primarily because of the complexity of the spells involved. They were O.W.L. level so it was to be expected. About two weeks before the game, the potion was finally ready. They drank it in the bathroom. Harry felt a squirming sensation throughout his body for several minutes and the image of a panther appeared in his mind, after which he felt completely exhausted. Hermione was tired too and picked up the book.

"It says here," she said, "that we shouldn't try to transform for 24 hours. It will still take some time to master it, but..." Hermione trailed off and Harry nodded.

"I think my form is a panther," Harry said. "Or at least, that's the animal that came to mind when I drank the potion."

"That means that my form is a lioness," Hermione replied.

"It suits you," Harry said with a smile.

After Gryffindor's victory in the Quidditch game, Harry overheard a conversation in the forest between Snape and Quirrell which both seemed to confirm his suspicions and muddy them. Why would Snape be trying to bully Quirrell when they seemed to be on the same side? Snape was an ex-Death Eater and Quirrell was harbouring one. Something didn't quite add up.

Soon, Harry and Hermione had something else to worry about. Hagrid, it seemed, had somehow acquired a Norwegian Ridgeback dragon egg and hatched it. Harry remembered Wood saying something about Charlie Weasley studying dragons and wrote a letter to him, explaining the situation. Several days later, he got a reply and instructions on what to do. Several days following that, Hagrid took Norbert to Hogsmeade where Charlie and his friends had arrived on broomsticks to take Norbert away.

The latest news on the Gryffindor grapevine was that Neville got caught out of bounds (because he forgot the common room password again). When questioned, he admitted to planning some scheme to get Harry expelled. McGonagall decided to suspend him but was overruled by Dumbledore. She ended up deducting fifty points from Gryffindor and gave him a detention.

Harry began to worry about the whereabouts of his invisibility cloak. There were only two candidates and he didn't like either one of them. After tending to the potion, Harry went to the dormitory and dug through Neville's belongings, the cloak was not there.

As the exams loomed, Harry and Hermione began focusing more and more on their studies. The potion was nearly ready and they still hadn't quite figured out the connection between Quirrell and Snape. Their best guess was that Snape was after the Stone – no surprise

there – and didn't know about Pettigrew. Why, he was unsure, but it didn't really matter at this point. What was sure, was that Quirrell had obviously been one of the teachers who was protecting the Stone and that Snape was trying to figure out how to get around his spell...which meant that he must already know how to get past the others, and probably Fluffy too.

One day, Harry found himself outside the Forbidden Forest after Quidditch training. He could see a silvery trail. Letting curiosity get the better of him, Harry entered the forest. Half an hour later, he found a dead unicorn...and a cloaked figure feeding on its blood. The hooded figure moved swiftly towards Harry, who felt a terrible pain in his scar, but his Occlumency shields diluted it to a degree. The figure continued heading towards him, but a centaur arrived, drove it off, and introduced himself as Firenze.

"You are not safe here, Harry Potter," he said. "Climb onto my back, I must get you out of here." Just as Harry did this, more Centaurs arrived and chastised Firenze. After several minutes of arguing, Firenze took off with Harry.

"Do you know what unicorn blood is used for?" Firenze asked Harry.

"No, I don't," Harry said.

"It is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn," the centaur said. "Only one with nothing to lose and everything to gain would do it. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive even if you are an inch away from death, but at a terrible price.... you will have a half-life, a cursed life, the moment the blood touches your lips."

"Who would be that desperate?" Harry wondered. "If you're going to be cursed forever, why would you even want to live?"

"Unless," Firenze said, "You only needed to stay alive long enough to drink something else..."

"The Philosopher's Stone!" Harry exclaimed and Firenze nodded. "But who?"

"Can you think of no one?" Firenze asked.

"Voldemort!" Harry realized and Firenze nodded again. This just muddled things even more. Why would Snape be trying to get the Stone for Voldemort while bullying Quirrell, who also, it seemed, worked for Voldemort? Why weren't they cooperating instead? There was definitely more going on than met the eye.

Harry later confided in Hermione what he had learned and the pain in his scar.

"It has to be some kind of warning," Harry said. "That danger is nearby."

"Has it ever hurt before?" Hermione wanted to know and Harry shook his head.

"Don't worry," he said, trying to smile, "I've found that Occlumency can head off the worst effects. At most, it'll be a minor distraction."

"I guess I'm going to have to be a little more careful this time," Hermione said before starting her Legilimency practice with him.

After Harry had successfully, though only barely, managed to fend off her attack, they switched. Hermione too managed to fend him off. They then went on to a rather painful session of trying to transform into their animal forms. Harry managed to change his entire arm. Hermione managed to change her head and Harry tried not to laugh at the image of Hermione with a lioness's head.

Exams finally came. Harry did his best to concentrate and ignore the irritation in his forehead. He managed to make a pineapple tap dance in Charms, successfully turned a mouse into a nearly perfect matchbox in Transfiguration, and brewed a moderately good Forgetfulness potion in Potions. It wasn't as good as Hermione's, but was still pretty good. The last exam was History of Magic. Harry was very grateful when Professor Binns finally told them to put their quills down.

"Hermione," he said as they left. "I've been thinking. How exactly did Hagrid get a dragon's egg? I mean they're restricted as hell and I doubt very many people carry them around in their pockets?" Hermione's eyes went wide and they went to visit Hagrid.

"Hullo," he said, smiling, "Finished yer exams?" Harry and Hermione nodded. "Got time for a drink?" Hagrid continued and they shook their heads.

"No, but we want to ask you something. Tell us about that person who gave you the dragon egg."

"He wore a cloak and wouldn't take it off. Might o' been a dragon dealer," Hagrid said. "Yea get lots o' strange folk in the Hogs Head."

"What did you talk about?" Harry asked, trying another tack, "Did you mention Hogwarts?"

"Mighta come up," Hagrid said as he frowned, trying to remember, "Yeah...we talked about my job and the egg, played cards, and Fluffy came up."

"Did he seem interested in Fluffy?" Harry asked with a calm he was not feeling.

"Yeah...he did seem quite interested... I mean how many three-headed dogs d'yeh meet? So I told him, Fluffy's a piece of cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus' play him a bit o'music an' he'll fall right ter sleep..." Hagrid suddenly looked horrified.

"Oops, I really shoudln'ta said that," he said, "Forget I ever said anything."

"Of course," Harry said with a smile and then he and Hermione began running back to the castle.

"Should we tell Dumbledore?" Hermione said.

"Won't do any good," Harry said, "He wouldn't believe us. We're going to have to go after it ourselves."

"Tonight?" Hermione asked.

"Tonight!"

Harry and Hermione met in the Gryffindor common room that night. The invisibility cloak was still nowhere to be found. But, by far the most shocking thing was that the Marauder's Map indicated that

Snape was in his room...and that Quirrell was going after the Stone. This only served to confuse Harry and Hermione even further. Suddenly, they heard footsteps and the door to the tower opened, apparently of its own accord. Hermione snapped her wand up and said "Petrificus Totalus".

There was a loud 'thud' as something hit the floor. Harry walked over and felt around, finally grabbing the cloak, revealing Ron and Neville underneath, rigid in the Full Body-Bind

"Tsk tsk tsk," Harry said, "Taking something that's not yours." Harry and Hermione donned the cloak and headed out of the common room, toward the third floor corridor.

After two close encounters, one with Mrs. Norris and the other with Peeves, they finally reached the door. Hermione unlocked it with a whispered, "Alohomora."

The door swung open, revealing Fluffy. There was also a harp near the door. Harry and Hermione moved over to it and Harry tentatively ran his hands across the strings. Fluffy yawned for a moment and then began growling again. Harry realized that he could not play it without risking his life. Hermione, fortunately, had a solution.

"Iugis Organum," she whispered, pointing her wand at the harp, which began playing a light tune. Fluffy yawned again and fell asleep. Harry and Hermione shed the cloak and he stuffed it into his pocket. They pulled up the trapdoor and went through... and found themselves in some kind of plant that began wrapping snake-like tendrils around them.

"Stop moving," Hermione said. "This is Devil's Snare...let's see; what did Professor Sprout say... it likes the dark and damp..."

"Fire," Harry declared and Hermione began sending her bluebell flames at the Devil's Snare. The plant instantly loosened its grip on them so they pulled themselves free and started going down the corridor.

They came to a room with a high ceiling and dozens of odd-looking birds. Hermione tried, "Alohomora" on the door and it didn't work. Harry suddenly realized that the birds were actually keys and his Seeker eye began looking for...



"There!" he said, pointing at one of them. It was large and old-fashioned, and its wing was bent on one side. Harry and Hermione each jumped on a broom and went after it.

The instant they did, the keys began swarming around them and they lost sight of the key. It took Harry several minutes to find it again, but he finally did. They flew down, dismounted and Harry jammed the key into the lock and turned. The door opened into a large chamber with a giant, larger than life chess set.

"Oh, great. Just great." Harry said, "I'm terrible at chess."

"So am I," Hermione said, "But we have no choice." Harry became a bishop and Hermione a castle. The game seemed to drag on forever. Sweat beaded down Harry's cheek. He could see only one way to win and prayed that he wasn't wrong. He sacrificed his last knight to draw the Queen away and then moved forward to checkmate the King. The King dropped his crown at Harry's feet. He let out a sigh of relief. Harry and Hermione rushed through the next door and saw a large, dead, and very smelly troll.

"I'm so glad we don't have to face this challenge," Harry said and they went through the next door, which led them to a room with a table. There were seven differently shaped vials standing on it in a line. Harry and Hermione stepped over the threshold and instantly, purple flames sprung up behind them and black flames in front of them.

Hermione saw a roll of paper and unrolled it. It was a riddle. She read it through several times and began muttering to herself as she walked up and down the line of bottles. Finally, she clapped her hands.

"I've got it," she said. "The smallest bottle will get us through the black fire, to the Stone." Harry grabbed the bottle. There wasn't much left in it.

"There's only enough in here for one person," he said, "Which one will take you back through the purple flames?" Hermione pointed at a rounded bottle on the right end of the line.

"You drink that," he said.

"And then do what?" Hermione said.

"Find McGonagall and Flitwick," Harry said. "I might be able to hold Quirrel off for a while but I'm no match for him in the long run."

"But Harry," she said, "What if You-Know..." Harry glared at her, "What if Vo-Voldemort is with him?"

"Well, I got lucky against him before," he said, indicating his scar. "maybe I'll be lucky again." Hermione trembled and threw her arms around Harry, who hugged her back.

"Good luck," she said "And take care." She took a sip of the rounded bottle and went through the purple flames. Harry downed the smallest bottle and went through the black flames to the last chamber. Quirrel was waiting for him.

"I see you aren't surprised to see me," Quirrel said.

"No," Harry replied, "But I am quite confused."

"I bet you are," Quirrel said. "Let me straighten a few things out. I was the one who let the troll in. I was the one who tried to jinx your broom..." Harry's eyes went wide. Snape had actually been trying to save his life? It didn't make sense and yet it did. 'My dad did try to save his life so the debt must have been transferred to me when he died,' Harry realized.

"And now," Quirrel said, "I will kill you." Quirrel snapped his fingers and ropes appeared out of thin air. Harry tried to dodge, but he wasn't fast enough and was soon bound to the floor. Quirrel then began trying to puzzle out the Mirror.

Finally, he said, "What does this mirror do? How does it work? Help me, Master." To Harry's surprise, a high cold voice answered.

"Use the boy," it said. Quirrell's eyes lit up.

"Of course," he said and clapped his hands, releasing Harry from the ropes. Harry slowly got up and his hand started to migrate towards his wand and stopped when Quirrel pointed his wand at him.

"Don't even think about it," Quirrel said, "Now, come here, look into the mirror and tell me what you see." Harry walked up to the mirror and saw his reflection, who smiled at him. It put its hand in its pocket and pulled out a blood red stone. It then winked and put the stone back in the pocket...and as it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his pocket.

"Well," Quirrel asked. "What do you see?" Harry summoned his courage and strengthened his Occlumency shields as much as possible.

"I see myself holding the Quidditch Cup," he lied.

Quirrel cursed and said, "Get out of the way!" Harry moved aside and started to make a break for it when he heard the voice suddenly say.

"He lies...he lies!" Harry silently cursed, wondering how Voldemort had figured it out. 'Maybe it was a lucky guess,' he thought.

"Potter, come back here," Quirrel said. "Tell me what you saw!"

"Let me speak to him," the voice commanded.

"Master," Quirrel said, "you are not strong enough."

"I have strength enough for this," Voldemort said and Quirrel unwrapped his turban and turned around. In horror, Harry saw a face in the back of Quirrell's head. It was chalk with glaring red eyes and slits for noses... 'Like a snake,' Harry realized.

"Harry Potter," the face whispered. "See what I have become? Mere shadow and vapour. I have form only when I can share another body, but fortunately, there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds. Unicorn blood has strengthened me these past weeks and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a new body for myself. Now, give me the stone in your pocket." Harry stumbled backward.

"Don't be a fool," Voldemort snarled, "Better save your own life and join me or you'll face the same end as your parents. They died begging for mercy..."

"LIAR!" Harry shouted and Quirrel started walking backwards towards him.

"How touching," Voldemort said. "I have always valued bravery. Your father died first after putting up a courageous death. But your mother died needlessly trying to protect you. Now give me the Stone unless you want her to have died in vain."

"NEVER!" Harry shouted and sprang for the flame door.

Voldemort screamed, "SEIZE HIM!" and Quirrel darted forward and grabbed Harry's wrist. At once, Harry felt a searing pain in his scar, despite his shields. Quirrel fell back and Harry saw that his hand had been burnt. 'Curious,' he thought, 'I wonder,' even as Voldemort shrieked.

"Seize him, seize him!" Quirrel lunged towards Harry, who dodged out of the way, but Quirrel hit the mirror. Suddenly, he felt a burning sensation as he touched the glass. Harry looked and saw his mirror image in the mirror. As Quirrel continued to touch the mirror image, he began to crumble into dust.

Harry's scar was now hurting beyond his ability to suppress. Suddenly, just before Quirrel's head turned to dust, a dark form erupted out of the back of his head and flew away, passing through Harry as it did. Just then, he heard someone mutter something and the flames died, revealing Hermione, McGonagall, Flitwick and, to his dismay, Dumbledore. Hermione came running up and embraced him.

"Harry," she said, "Are you alright?"

"I've been better," he said, "But I'll live."

"Where's Vo-Voldemort?" Hermione asked.

"He was in Quirrel."

"In Quirrel?" Hermione asked.

"I'll explain later," Harry said, "But he's gone now. I don't know where he went, but I have the feeling that this isn't the last time I'll run into him." Harry then turned to Dumbledore, "Speaking of which,

I want to know just why Voldemort wanted to kill me." Dumbledore's eyes twinkled.

"I'll tell you that when you're ready...when you're older," he said.

"No," Harry said. "You are going to tell me right here and now. I already know some of it anyway." Dumbledore's eyes went wide.

"Just what do you know?" he asked.

"Only that there was some kind of prophecy about Voldemort and myself," Harry said. "I think I deserve to know the contents, wouldn't you agree, Professor?"

"How long have you known?" Dumbledore said in a voice that, for him, was almost fearful.

"Quite a while now," Harry said. Sirius had told him when he was ten. Dumbledore, for one moment, went pale.

"It is a terrible burden, Harry," Dumbledore said in his best grandfather voice, "I do not think you are old enough to handle it."

"With all due respect, Professor, I have to ask you how you could not have known about Quirrell. You are, after all, a master Legilimens? Am I right?" Dumbledore swallowed.

"Are you blackmailing me?" he said.

"No," Harry said. "I am merely asking a question that you will answer."

"Very well," Dumbledore said, "Come to my office."

After Dumbledore had shown him the memory of the prophecy, Harry started to leave.

"Harry, there is something you should know. Your rightful placement was with Vernon and Petunia Dursley. It was in your parents' will. Your mother's sacrifice created a bond which will keep you safe as long as you can live somewhere where your mother's blood flows."

"Really?" Harry asked. He knew what was in his parents' will and it specified that he was not to be placed with the Dursleys.

Dumbledore got a roll of parchment out. Harry could see the lines: In the event of our deaths, our son Harry is to be placed with my sister Petunia Dursley and her husband Vernon.

"Sorry Headmaster, but that is a forgery," Harry said. "Their real will states that I am to stay with Sirius Black. You try to pass that piece of rubbish off and I will take legal action."

He left the office and found Hermione waiting for him.

"You never told me about a prophecy," she said.

"I'm sorry," Harry replied. "I promise I'll fill you in on all the details."

"Are you sure he was telling the truth?" Hermione asked.

"As sure as I can be," he replied and they walked in a classroom where he recited the prophecy and told her that Voldemort only knew the first half. Hermione was silent for a long time.

"But Harry," she suddenly said, "I'm sure you weren't the only person who fit the requirements." Harry nodded.

"The other was Neville," he said and Hermione's eyes went wide.

"I guess that would explain a great deal," she said, "But why you and not him?"

"Several reasons, one I, like Voldemort, am half-blood..."

"Voldemort is half-blood!" Hermione exclaimed and Harry smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I know it's very hypocritical, but it brings me to my second point. Voldemort is the direct descendant of Salazar Slytherin... and I am the direct descendant of Godric Gryffindor."

"I see," Hermione said, "I guess it's no wonder why he viewed you as the greater threat."

"Yes and it would also explain why he wanted to kill my father, but not my mother. He wanted to wipe out the Gryffindor line."

"How did you survive?" Hermione asked.

"Because of my mother. She sacrificed herself to save me. Dumbledore said that an act like that creates a powerful protection – one that can stop even the Killing Curse. However, when the curse rebounded on Voldemort, it somehow created a link between us, hence the scar. Dumbledore isn't exactly sure how or why but..." Harry shrugged. "But," Hermione said, "Why would Dumbledore continue to... promote Neville when you are alive and marked?"

"I'm not sure," Harry said. "But my guess is that Neville is easier to control." Hermione nodded in understanding,

"So he just wants to get rid of Voldemort and then toss the person who did it aside to claim the glory?"

"Well," Harry said, "This is all just speculation and while I would not be surprised if that was the case, it is also possible that he wants to...control the Ministry so to speak. It wouldn't surprise me if after I deal with Voldemort, Dumbledore might have me sent to Azkaban and in his high up job at the Wizengamot, he could confiscate all the money in all the Potter and Gryffindor vaults and seize all properties." Hermione's eyes went wide at this.

"Again, I'm not entirely sure what his agenda is," Harry said, "but I'm sure we're going to find out soon enough. In the meantime, I have more important things to focus on."

The rest of the year passed relatively uneventfully. Harry and Hermione finally nabbed Pettigrew in Quirrell's room. With Professor Flitwick's help, they turned him into the Aurors where Madam Bones of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement said that if Sirius turned himself in, there would be a trial for him as soon as possible. Both Minister Fudge and Dumbledore tried to oppose it but Harry threatened to withdraw from Hogwarts and go to Durmstrang.

Sirius was brought into the courtroom by the Aurors and placed in the chair in the centre of the room where he was chained up.

"This is the trial of one Sirius Orion Black – the charges are being a Death Eater, the murder of thirteen Muggles and betraying James and Lily Potter to You-Know-Who." Madam Bones said, "How do you plead?"

"Not guilty," Sirius replied.

"Administer the Veritaserum," Bones ordered. An Auror poured three drips of the potion down Sirius's throat. Madam Bones began the questioning.

"What is your name?"

"Sirius Orion Black."

"Are you or have you ever been a Death Eater."

"No."

"Did you betray James and Lily Potter to You-Know-Who?"

"No."

"Then who did?"

"Peter Pettigrew. My relationship with James was so well known, it was obvious I would be picked as a Secret Keeper, so we went with Peter."

"Did you murder the Muggles?"

"No. Peter performed a non-verbal spell which and blew the street, killing the Muggles. He cut off his own finger and transformed into a rat. He and I are unregistered Animagi."

"Did you abduct Harry Potter?"

"No. James and Lily's will stated that I was to look after him if anything happened to them. When I took him, Hagrid was planning on kidnapping him, with the intent to take him to Lily's magic-hating Muggle relatives against their wills, on Dumbledore's orders. I don't blame Hagrid in the slightest – he is very loyal to Dumbledore who he owes a great deal and would have done nearly anything for him. I



had their wills executed within two hours of their deaths and formally adopted Harry.

The Wizengamot deliberated. Within five minutes, they had cleared Sirius of all charges. They also apologized for the previous administration's actions which led to them spending the previous ten years in hiding. But that wasn't the end of it. Dumbledore had a few things to say.

"Sirius, it is in Harry's best interests to go to the Dursleys for the holidays. I am asking you to consider doing it. He would be there the entire summer, Christmas and Easter holidays," he said.

"And when would I get to see him?" Sirius asked.

"You wouldn't. Their conditions on taking him would be that there would be no contact with witches and wizards and steps would be taken to make sure there was no magic used."

"I refuse to send him there. They hate our world and they would kill him. I expressed those fears to Hagrid and he was still going to take him there. They abused Lily and I refuse to let him do the same to Harry."

Dumbledore was about to say something but Madam Bones interrupted him.

"Alright, Mr. Black. Harry will not be sent to the Dursleys. He can return home with you."

Sirius left the courtroom a free man. He and Harry had a butterbeer to celebrate in the Three Broomsticks before Harry returned to school.

For the rest of the school year, Hermione practiced her Animagus transformation as often as possible and then practiced Occlumency and Legilimency with Harry. Gryffindor's winning of the game against Ravenclaw secured that house both the Quidditch Cup and the House Cup for the first time in years. The train ride back to Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  was also uneventful. Harry was met by Sirius at the station. There was also a couple standing next to Dumbledore looking at him. The woman was very thin while the man looked like a walrus with a moustache to match. Neville was seen to go with Ron

and his family. After bidding goodbye to Hermione and promising to write, Sirius Apparated him to their home. Tonks and Remus greeted Harry enthusiastically and Harry began telling them all about what had happened.

"You know, Harry," Sirius finally said, "You really are so much like your father. Except, of course, that you're not the height of cool and you have far more luck with smart ladies."

"Hermione is my friend," Harry said defensively.

"Sure, but she's also the brightest witch in your school, right?" Harry nodded and Sirius continued, "Well, so was Lily."

"Doesn't mean a thing," Harry said.

"Sure," Sirius said, "You just keep telling yourself that."

The End

To be continued in Harry Potter-Black and the Chamber of Secrets

Please review, with thanks to my beta, witowsmp

The excellent JKR (despite the crapness of HBP and DH) owns HP, not me, so there.

## Chapter Six

### Second Year

Harry was very puzzled. Hermione hadn't been sending him letters since term finished. He'd sent plenty to her via Hedwig, but had never gotten any replies.

Frustrated after a week and a half, he wrote to her via the Muggle postal service and got a reply. Eventually, he was able to pester Sirius into having a Muggle telephone line installed. But owl post was never received by Harry. Sirius, Remus and Tonks got their post though. He decided to try and find out why.

But he and Sirius had more important things to worry about now. The two were in Gringotts, straightening a few things out. Since the end of term, Dumbledore had been trying to get Harry into the hands of the Dursley family but had failed when Sirius kept refusing.

"You have our assurances, Mr. Black," Ragnok said, "That our lawyers will make sure Harry here does not go near the Dursley family. My personal recommendation is to make Harry an official protectorate of the Goblin nation. That way, if Dumbledore tries anything, he will have the full force of the Goblins against him.

"Also, I am concerned that Dumbledore tried to give Neville Longbottom your father's invisibility cloak. I can make some inquiries and find out what other Potter belongings he has and return them to you."

Sirius and Harry agreed and they soon left the bank, with Harry being an official protectorate of the Goblin nation, an honour rarely bestowed upon humans.

Albus Dumbledore was not having a very good day. Sirius Black was now a free man and Harry was now protected by the Goblins, making it that much harder to control him. He had thought that telling Harry the prophecy would help, but he had made another mistake in repeatedly asking where Sirius was. Damn it all! Dumbledore thought. He had to get Harry under control and soon. Suddenly, a

thought occurred to him and a new plan began forming in Dumbledore's mind.

Harry walked into his room to see a house-elf he did not recognize.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" Harry asked.

"I is Dobby," the house-elf said with a bow, "I has come to warn Harry Potter."

"Warn me about what?"

"There is a plot to make terrible things happen at Hogwarts this year. Dobby has been knowing it for months and Harry Potter must not be putting himself into danger. He is being too important."

"What terrible things?" Dobby made a choking noise and began smashing his head against the wall. Harry quickly pulled him away.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Dobby must punish himself, he is being a bad house-elf." Harry sighed

"Why are you warning me?" he wondered "This doesn't have something to do with Voldemort, does it?" He noticed that Dobby was drifting towards the wall and hastily added.

"You could just shake or nod." Dobby shook his head.

"Not He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, sir..." Dobby's eyes went wide, as if he was trying to give Harry a clue. Harry, however, was completely baffled.

"Well, then I have no idea as to who it could be," Harry said. "However, I am still going back to Hogwarts. I have a friend, Hermione..."

"A friend who does not even send Harry Potter letters?"

"Just because the owl post wasn't getting through, but...wait a minute..." Harry said "Have you been stopping my mail?"

"Harry Potter must not be angry; Dobby did it for the best. Dobby had hoped that if Harry Potter thought he didn't have any friends that he wouldn't go back to Hogwarts."

"Well, you thought wrong," Harry said. "I'm going back to Hogwarts and I don't care what you say or do. We've also worked out a way to send letters so I've not missed much." Dobby whimpered. If Harry had been in a Muggle house, it would've been an easy matter, but unfortunately the Ministry could only detect magic, not its caster, which was why only muggle-borns ever got warnings from the Improper Use of Magic Office. Dobby knew this all too well...

"Look," Harry said, "I promise I'll be on my guard."

"Harry Potter must not die!" Dobby said.

"I won't," Harry said. "I survived Voldemort twice, so whatever this, it can't be that bad."

"Oh, no sir. It is far worse. Oh how Dobby wishes he could tell." The house-elf then began banging his head against the wall again and Harry again stopped him.

"Can you give me any more hints?" Harry asked and immediately regretted it when Dobby tried to smash against the wall yet again

"I will not die," he reassured Dobby "That is a promise."

"Harry Potter must give his word that he is not going back to Hogwarts," Dobby insisted.

"Then get out of here because there is no way you can convince me not to go back!"

Harry shouted. Dobby whimpered and disappeared with a 'pop.' Sirius and Remus came into the room

"Everything okay, pup?" Sirius asked and he told them about Dobby.

"That is indeed quite odd," Sirius said. "I wonder what he could've been trying to tell you."

"I don't know," Harry said "I guess I'll just have to wait and see what happens."

Sirius invited Hermione and her parents around various times over the holidays and both groups arranged a surprise party for Harry on the 31st. During the day, Harry and Hermione's letters from Hogwarts arrived. They were astonished to see that most of the booklist comprised of books by one Gilderoy Lockhart.

The Grangers spent the night with Harry and co and the next day, went to Diagon Alley. Harry gave them a money bag after seeing the very unfair interest rates that were being charged for converting Muggle money into galleons. The Grangers were reluctant to accept but Harry practically forced them too. After a bite of lunch, they went around to the shops, finally reaching Flourish and Botts. A large banner was stretched across the upper windows.

Gilderoy Lockhart will be signing copies of his autobiography,

Magical Me, today 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

"We actually get to meet him," Hermione said, "I mean he's, written almost the whole booklist." They slipped inside and after grabbing their copies of The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2, got in line with the others. Lockhart slowly came into view. He was seated at a table, surrounded by large pictures of his own face, all winking and flashing dazzling white teeth at the crowd. The real one was wearing forget-me-not blue that matched his eyes and a pointed wizard hat set at a jaunty angle on his wavy hair.

"I never thought I'd see such a self-absorbed narcissist," Harry muttered under his breath. Hermione started to scowl just as the photographer turned to snarl at Harry

"Out of the way there...Merlin's Beard! It's Harry Potter!" Harry instantly knew that he had made a mistake. Damn it, I forgot to disguise myself. Harry, out of the corner of his eye, saw...

"And there's Neville Longbottom," the photographer pointed out. Lockhart seized their arms and dragged them forward as the photographer began clicking away like mad.

Harry looked at Sirius who chuckled. The young man gritted his teeth and thought, 'I am so getting back at you for this.'

"Nice big smile, Harry," Lockhart said, "The three of us together are worth the front page." Harry began focusing his mind just as Lockhart began making a speech.

"Ladies and Gentleman, what an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I've been sitting on for some time! When young Harry and Neville stepped into Flourish and Botts today, they only wanted to buy my autobiography, which I shall be happy to present to them now, free of charge... along with my collected works." he paused to allow the applause to die down, "They had no idea that they would shortly be getting much, much more than my book, Magical Me. They and their schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, ladies and gentleman, I have great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September, I will be taking up the post of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher..."

Harry then scowled. "So you're responsible for placing the EIGHT books you've written on the school booklist. It may escape your attention Professor, but there are some families which cannot afford TWO HUNDRED galleons for part of a school booklist. Granted two hundred galleons is like pocket money to myself and the Malfoys but there are some families which don't have that sort of money."

Lockhart suddenly let out a massive fart and developed a rather bad case of chicken pox... in all the wrong places. Sirius and Remus smothered laughter. Hermione merely scowled. Harry used the distraction to disentangle himself from Lockhart, get his books, and leave. Before Harry left, he dropped his Lockhart collection into Ginny Weasley's cauldron (he knew they were poor, and even though he and Ron didn't get along, he got on well with the twins and knew Ginny was good).

"You have these, miss," Harry said. "I'll get my own although I don't particularly want to inflate his coffers anymore."

Harry spent a few days looking through Lockhart's books and found himself re-reading entries. One entry he saw was a hex which would transform a werewolf back into a human. Living with a werewolf, he

knew for a fact there was no hex or spell which would do such a transformation.

Hermione came over one day and Harry brought up the books.

"Could you make up a timeline of these events, please? There are some things that don't add up, especially since he claimed to have used a spell to transform a werewolf back into a human. There is no such spell or we would know about it." With Remus' permission, Harry had told his best friend about Remus' 'furry little problem'.

Over the next few days, Hermione read through the books and made her notes. After a week, she presented her findings to Harry.

"A lot of these events don't make sense," she began. "It says in this book that he did this but the other book says that at the same time, he did something else. I've also checked in the Black library on some of these events – they took place when he was an infant and before he was even born."

"So he's a fraud?" Harry asked. Hermione reluctantly nodded.

The rest of the holidays went well with no attempts by Dumbledore at sending Harry to the Dursleys. At King's Cross on September 1st, Harry, with Hermione, tried to go through the barrier and hit a solid wall.

"What the hell?" he wondered.

"Something is wrong," Hermione said, wondering if this was Dobby's doing.

"Not to worry," Sirius said and side-along Apparated them onto the platform.

"There we go," he said, "Goodbye." Sirius hugged Harry. "I'll be seeing you."

On the Hogwarts Express, Harry and Hermione found an empty compartment and got caught up on the other happenings of their summer. Hermione showed off her Animagus form to her impressed friend.



"I must say, you make a very good-looking lioness," Harry said, and then showed her his form.

"You're not too bad a panther yourself," Hermione replied.

The students arrived at Hogwarts to find out that Neville and Ron Weasley never showed up. After the Sorting and the Feast, Dumbledore stood to make some announcements:

"The Forest is forbidden to all students," he began. "Mr. Filch has asked me to remind you that no magic is allowed in the corridors. Quidditch try-outs are the second weekend of term. Any student, second year and above, interested should give their names to their Heads of House. And now I would like to introduce our new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Lockhart." Gilderoy Lockhart stood to rather dismal applause. The Daily Prophet article had included everything that had happened at the book store, including the announcement that he was forcing every student to buy all his books at great expense.

After the singing of the school song (Hermione picked the tune Everything I Do, I'll Do It For You this year while Harry sang it to Bat Out of Hell), Dumbledore dismissed the students.

The students later heard that Neville and Ron Wesley used a flying car to get to school in an attempt to outshine both Harry and Lockhart. McGonagall was going to suspend them but Dumbledore overrode the punishments. Snape made a very public fifty-point deduction from Gryffindor.

In Herbology, Professor Sprout had them re-pot Mandrakes. In Transfiguration, Harry and Hermione were the only students who successfully turned a beetle into a button. Neville, in contrast, somehow managed to set his desk on fire and Ron managed to turn McGonagall's best hat into a block of ice (she gave him detention for it, deducted twenty points and threatened to kick both him and Neville out of her class). After lunch was Defence Against the Dark Arts. On his way to the class, Harry found himself facing a Gryffindor first-year named Colin Creevey who was asking for a signed photo. Harry only laughed at this and pushed his way through the gathering crowd.

"I'm serious," Creevey said.

"Why me?" Harry said, not even pausing or looking back "Why not Neville?"

"Because you're the Boy-Who-Lived."

"And I don't give out signed photos," Harry said, as he continued on towards class.

"Signed photos?" Malfoy said, as he turned the corner, "Who's giving out signed photos? Ahh...Potter...trying to compete with Longbottom, I see?"

"Shut it, Malfoy. Why would I want to compete with Longbottom?" Harry said. "Don't give me an excuse to hex you." Hermione pulled Harry's arm just in time for him to see Gilderoy Lockhart come around a corner. Harry started to walk away but it was too late.

"I heard that, Mr. Potter," Lockhart said, "And I must remind you that students are not allowed to use magic in the corridors..." Lockhart's attention was suddenly diverted by Colin Creevey's camera and Harry and Hermione quickly walked towards the classroom while the teacher posed for photos with Neville.

In Defence Against the Dark Arts, Harry quickly saw that Lockhart really was just a self-absorbed git. The very first thing he did, after giving a very pompous self-introduction, was to give a quiz on his books. Harry blew it off, not really caring about the answers. Hermione, however, not only got full marks, but also ten points for Gryffindor (although she agreed that he was a fraud, she would play along with it so he would award the house points in vast quantities).

It finally came to a header when Lockhart, after building up a great deal of suspense revealed a cage of Cornish pixies. Harry and Seamus Finnegan burst into laughter. It was not so funny, however, when Lockhart unleashed them on the class.

"Come on now," Lockhart said. "Round them up; they're only pixies." He then bellowed "Peskipiski Pesternomi!" and nothing happened. One of the pixies seized his wand and threw it out the window. Harry scowled and began casting Freezing Charms with Hermione. The bell rang and the students all quickly ran out except for Harry and Hermione, who were too busy freezing the pixies.

"He really is a fraud," Harry said afterwards. Hermione didn't say anything because Lockhart awarded fifty points to Gryffindor for their hard work.

Harry spent a great deal of time of the next several days dodging Lockhart and Creevey, though Creevey was harder as he seemed to have memorized Harry's schedule. Since the disaster with the pixies, Lockhart hadn't brought any more live creatures with him to class. Instead, he had taken to reading passages from his books and re-enacting certain scenes. Neville, almost invariably, ended up being chosen to help re-enact. He relished it, being the centre of attention and enjoyed rubbing in the fact that Lockhart would award generous amounts of points to Gryffindor afterwards.

"I don't know how much more I can put up with that pompous self opinionated idiot." Harry was heard to remark after one lesson.

Harry and Hermione met up later that day to discuss the timeline she had worked on.

"I propose we show this to a few of the Ravenclaws in the library. I know that one of them who is in our year is related to someone who works for the Prophet." Hermione said.

"Just don't let Percy Weasley see it though." said Harry, "According to the twins, he'll turn us in faster than that if he got wind of any rule breaking and he would class this as rule breaking – disrespecting teachers."

On Saturday night, Harry decided that Lockhart really needed a good pranking. He donned his invisibility cloak and slipped out of the Tower. Almost there, Harry stopped when he heard the voice.

"Come...come to me...Let me rip you...Let me tear you...Let me kill you..."

He looked around and saw no one. Harry began walking, not caring about the direction, the prank all but forgotten. He turned to a corner to see Mrs. Norris. Harry tried to relax and walk past her, but the cat suddenly began running off. 'Damnit!' Harry thought and began running. He did not stop until he reached Gryffindor tower.

The next day, Harry told Hermione what he had heard. She was just as baffled as he was. The next several weeks passed relatively uneventfully.

Harry gave Hermione some new books for her birthday, along with a pet cat which she named Crookshanks. She had seen the cat during the trip to Diagon Alley but neither she or her parents could buy him because they didn't convert any of their Muggle money into galleons and they refused to let Harry buy him for her, not wanting him to spend anymore money on them. But they didn't know that Harry returned to the Alley the next day (with Tonks) and arranged to purchase the cat and have the owner of the pet shop send him to Hermione on her birthday.

Harry and Hermione showed their Lockhart timeline to a few Ravenclaws complete with notes on where to find specific bits in the books.

"But you must have got it wrong." One Ravenclaw said, "Lockhart is a genius."

"His looks have you brainwashed." Harry said, "Take a look at a few of the entries we've highlighted."

The students began to look up the entries in Lockhart's books (Harry and Hermione noticed that a few of them were second hand), determined to prove the duo wrong. As they noticed the truth unravelling, they looked at other entries.

"He really is a fraud." A second student said, "What do we do now?"

"My mother works for the Daily Prophet." The first student said, "We'll send this to her and she can dig up some dirt. I think someone else did all this and Lockhart is taking the credit for it. But why haven't they said anything?"

Halloween came and went. Harry and Hermione didn't attend the feast in the Great Hall since they (with McGonagall's permission) had left the school with Sirius to visit his parent's graves, something they did each year. When they returned the next day, the school was full of gossip flying about.

"What's going on?" Harry asked someone. He was ignored and most people ran away from the sight of him. Hermione ended up asking someone who told her.

"Apparently, someone killed Filch's cat in the corridors on the second floor last night and left a message on the walls." The student took Harry and Hermione to the scene of the crime and pointed at the writing on the wall.

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED.

ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.

"Why are people running away at the sight of me?" Harry asked.

"Well, because you weren't around last night, most people think you did it. I'd watch out for Longbottom and Ron Weasley if I were you – they are spreading the story that you are the Heir of Slytherin. Only a handful of us know you are innocent. Fred and George Weasley are trying to convince people of your innocence while I know for a fact that YOU are Gryffindor's Heir."

They thanked the student then went back to the common room.

"Harry," Hermione said in a quiet corner, "The Chamber...that reminds me of something I read in Hogwarts, A History...something about a secret chamber. However, I didn't bring my copy to school because I couldn't make room with all the Lockhart books. Have you got your copy?" Harry nodded. He went up to his dorm and took it out, bringing it down. He made a mental note to buy her a multi-compartment trunk at some point. She found the entry on the Chamber and read the story to Harry.

She explained the story about Salazar Slytherin's disagreement with the other Founders, his alleged secret chamber, and his claim that one day his heir would return and unleash the horror within, purging the school of all who were unworthy to study magic. The horror within was, presumably, some kind of monster that only the Heir of Slytherin could control. The book told that the school had been searched many times and there was no evidence that Slytherin had constructed a secret broom cupboard (to much laughter), let alone a huge chamber which would hold a monster.

After Harry finished listening, he thought about how the Sorting Hat had wanted to put him in Slytherin. 'Ridiculous, of course!' he thought. 'Voldemort is the Heir of Slytherin, not me.' However, that did not, apparently explain how the Chamber had been opened if only Voldemort could've done it...especially since Voldemort was last reported to be somewhere in the forests of Albania. Something didn't add up, though neither Harry nor Hermione had any clue as to what.

Please review, with thanks to my beta witowsmp

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter Seven

Over the next several days, the school talked of little except the attack. Filch tried, rather unsuccessfully, to clean off the writing and, when he wasn't standing guard, tried to give students detention for things like 'breathing too loudly' and 'looking happy'.

Harry noted that Ginny Weasley somehow seemed even more disturbed than the others and heard from the twins that she was a great cat lover.

He and Hermione quickly figured out that the water had come from Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. Using his invisibility cloak, they entered the bathroom. A conversation with her revealed that Peeves the Poltergeist had seriously upset her at Nearly Headless Nick's Deathday party, which had happened at the same time as the Halloween feast. Afterwards, she had come here and tried to drown herself before remembering that she was already dead.

In the Gryffindor common room, Harry and Hermione heard Neville and Ron discussing things.

"Who do we know thinks Muggle-borns are scum?" Neville asked.

"Malfoy, of course," Ron said. "Look at his family; they could easily be Slytherin's descendants. They're certainly evil enough."

Harry quickly placed his hands over his mouth so that Neville and Ron wouldn't hear him trying not to laugh.

"Harry, wait!" Hermione said, "Malfoy may not be one attacking the students, but he might know who is..."

"I'm all ears." Harry said. Hermione dragged him into Myrtle's bathroom. She argued that no-one would hear them making secret plans in there.

"You told me that Lucius Malfoy was in You-Know-Who's inner circle but got off with claims of being under the Imperious curse. Surly he would know something about it and might have told Draco."

"But how are we going to find anything about it? Draco may be stupid, but he's not that stupid. He won't tell anyone but Crabbe and Goyle."

"I read about listening charms." Hermione said, "All we need to do is plant one on him, the Slytherin common room and his dorm..."

"That'll be easy, won't it?" Harry said, "Excuse me Professor Snape, will you please tell us the password to the Slytherin common room?" he asked in a mocking tone of voice.

"We don't need to do that – we can get one of your elves to do that. They can bypass wards so they can do the job."

Harry agreed that that was a good idea. He called Binky and told him what they had in mind. He agreed to do it and vanished. Binky reappeared five minutes later to report that he had finished.

"We can't listen to him all day – it would look suspicious if we were distracted by listening to conversations." Harry pointed out.

"Excuse me young master," Binky said, "Listening charms can be linked to Quick Quotes Parchment and Quills."

"That's it!" Hermione said, "Binky – can you get us some please?" Binky vanished then reappeared with the parchment and quill. It was decided to leave them in a cubicle with a strong locking charm on the door so no-one could get in.

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At the Quidditch game against Slytherin, Harry was attacked by a rogue Bludger, though he still managed to catch the Snitch and win the game. Students prevented Lockhart from approaching him while Harry was taken to the Hospital Wing where Madam Pomfrey fixed his arm in seconds.

An article about Lockhart appeared in the Daily Prophet a few days ago.

**GILDEROY LOCKHART – FRAUD?**

By Rita Skeeter



It has come to the attention of the Daily Prophet that Gilderoy Lockhart, Hogwarts Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher and hero to many could be a fraud.

Documents obtained by this paper have claimed that events written in his books conflict with events in his other books. Reports have also reached this reporter's ears about incompetence in his teachings.

Professor Lockhart was unavailable for comment as we went to press although Headmaster Dumbledore has full confidence in his choice of teacher and will not fire him unless there is undisputable evidence against him.

The Daily Prophet vows to continue investigations into Professor Lockhart based on these accusations.

In the second week of December, McGonagall was once again collecting the names of the students staying for the holidays. Harry and Hermione both signed the register of students returning home. Andromeda Tonks had invited her favourite nephew (Harry, not Draco) along with Sirius, Remus along with Hermione and her parents over to spend.

Dumbledore had summoned Harry to his office to try and talk him into going to the Dursley home for the holidays. Harry, of course, refused. He told the Headmaster that he had no say in what students did out of school.

A week later, Harry was stuck in the Hospital Wing with dragon pox. His area was magically sealed off as not to contaminate anyone else with it. The following day, to his shock, Hermione was brought in and put on the bed next to his. Madam Pomfrey and Snape were pouring potions down her throat.

After the two finished, Harry spoke up. "What happened to her?"

"None of your business Potter. Twenty points from Gryffindor for speaking out of turn." Snape snapped before leaving.

"She got bitten by a snake." Pomfrey answered before leaving to attend to other patients.

A few hours later, Hermione woke up. She told Harry what had happened.

In the Great Hall, a lot of students were gathered there for a duelling club which was being set up.

"Maybe Flitwick will be teaching us," someone said. "I heard that he was a champion dueller when he was young."

"As long as it's not..." another person trailed off when he saw Gilderoy Lockhart and Snape arrive. After Snape had demonstrated the Disarming Charm on Lockhart (too much cheering from most of the students), the students were split up into duelling pairs. Hermione inevitably ended up paired with Malfoy.

"One...two...three!" Lockhart said. Hermione raised her wand but Malfoy had already started moving at the 'two'. She was flung back and quickly jumped up.

"Rictusempra!" she said.

"Tarantallegra!" Malfoy said a few moments later. Hermione's spell hit him, causing him to fall to the ground, laughing. Her feet immediately began doing a tap dance.

"I said disarm only!" Lockhart said, "Stop, stop!"

"Finite Incantatem!" Snape lazily said and the spells all ceased.

"I think I'd better teach you how to block unfriendly spells," Lockhart said. "Longbottom and Finch-Fletchley..."

"Bad idea," Snape said "Longbottom causes devastation with the simplest of spells. We'll be sending what's left of Finch-Fletchley to the hospital wing in a matchbox. How about Miss Granger and Mister Malfoy?"

"Excellent idea," Lockhart said and then showed Hermione a complicated wiggle movement with his wand and ended up dropping it.

"Ooops...my wand is a little overexcited..."

Hermione merely shook her head. She already knew how to block and deflect spells. It was one of the many benefits of spending most of the summer in a house in which the Ministry can't detect magic. Snape whispered something into Malfoy's ear and the pale-haired boy immediately sneered at Hermione.

"Just do what I did, Hermione." Lockhart said, not knowing that she was ignoring him.

"Three...two...one...go." Malfoy raised his wand and said:

"Serpensortia!" the end of his wand exploded and a large black snake shot out of it and started slithering towards him. The crowd backed up in fear. Hermione backed away – one of her greatest fears was snakes. Before anyone could do anything, Malfoy banished the snake towards Hermione – it then bit her several times before Snape vanished it.

The following week, the snow had turned into a blizzard that resulted in Herbology being cancelled. Sprout wanted to fit scarves and socks on the Mandrakes and didn't feel she could trust anyone else with the operation.

Harry and Hermione had been released from the Hospital Wing. They had found out that Malfoy was receiving no punishment for summoning the snake or for setting it on Hermione.

Harry was going about the school finding somewhere to study but it seemed that everywhere he went, someone prevented him from entering. He even saw some Hufflepuffs talking to Hermione, trying to convince her to cut all ties with him. He began to make his way to the common room. His fury was so great that he didn't even pay attention to where he was going and almost ran into Hagrid.

"Why aren't yeh in class?"

"It was cancelled," Harry said, "What're you doing here?" Hagrid held up a limp rooster.

"Second one killed this term," he explained, "It's either foxes or a Blood-Suckin' Bugbear, but I need the Headmasters permission ter

put a charm on the coop." He looked at Harry more closely, "Yeh sure you're alright?"

"I'll be fine," Harry said, "It's just that everyone here seems to think that I'm the heir of Slytherin. Ridiculous, I know, but..." Harry sighed, "I have to be going to Transfiguration. I'll see you later."

Every couple of days, Harry and/or Hermione checked up on the parchment recording Malfoy's conversations. There wasn't anything about the Chamber of Secrets but it did record Malfoy admitting to some other Slytherins about his father's own 'Chamber of Secrets' hidden in Malfoy Manor with lots of dark items which Arthur Weasley would give his wife and children to get the chance to confiscate if he knew about them. Harry and Hermione vowed to send the information to Mr. Weasley as soon as possible.

When it was time for them to go home for the holidays, they took the parchment and quill with them and set it up in Harry's bedroom.

It was Harry's first Christmas at home which didn't involve only him, Sirius, Remus and the Tonks family.

Harry brought Hermione a set of very rare books – she would have kissed him there and then had her parents, Sirius, Remus along with Tonks and her family not been in the room. She got him a broomstick care kit and a personalised set of Seeker armour.

There was more gossip waiting when they returned to school. There was no sign of Ron or Neville and rumours were going about that they were the latest victims of the monster of Slytherin. In the end, it was discovered that using stolen ingredients from Snape's stores, they had attempted to make Polyjuice Potion in order to get into the Slytherin common room but in the end, they had ended up fouling up the job, well, the results were rather unspeakable. They were in hiding in a room in the hospital wing until Madam Pomfrey, Snape, Dumbledore and Healers from St. Mungos were able to heal them and restore them back to normal. Snape tried to issue punishments, but Dumbledore overruled him (again).

Several uneventful weeks went by. One day, Harry was walking by Moaning Myrtle's bathroom when he saw that it was flooding again. He heard Filch moaning and complaining and quickly walked in. Moaning Myrtle was crying, louder and harder than before. She

seemed to be hiding in her usual toilet. Harry noticed that it was dark in the bathroom because a sudden rush water had extinguished the candles on the walls and ceiling

"What's up, Myrtle?"

"Who's that?" the teenaged ghost said miserably "Come to throw something else at me?"

Harry waded across the water to her stall and said, "Why would I throw something at you?"

"Don't ask me," Myrtle shouted as she emerged from the toilet, causing even more water to spill out. "Here I am, minding my own business and someone thinks it's funny to throw a book at me."

"Who?"

"I don't know," Myrtle said. "I was just sitting in the U-bend, thinking about death, and it fell right through the top of my head." Myrtle glared at him. "It's over there, it got washed out..." she pointed to a place under the sink. Harry saw a small, thin book laying there. It had a shabby black cover and was very wet. Harry stepped over and picked it up, casting a quick drying charm on it. He saw that it was a diary and the faded year on the cover indicated that it was fifty years old. On the first page, he saw the name T.M. Riddle. Harry's eyes went wide as he remembered the trophy he had polished all those weeks ago. As he paged through the diary, however, he saw that there was no writing. The back cover indicated that it had been bought at a variety store on Vauxhall Road, London 'Must've been Muggle-born,' Harry thought.

He showed the diary to Hermione, who excitedly examined it. "Think about it, Harry," she said. "The Chamber of Secrets was last opened fifty years ago, this diary is fifty years old and its owner was given an Award for Special Services to the School, fifty years ago. What do you want to bet that Riddle was given the award for catching the Heir! His diary would probably explain everything," Hermione said and tapped an empty page three times with her wand

"Aparecium" she said and nothing happened. Undaunted, Hermione pulled out a Revealer and rubbed on the page. Again, nothing happened.

"That's odd!" Hermione said.

"Maybe we have to do something to unlock it?" Harry said, though he had no clue as to how it might be done.

Weeks passed, and Harry couldn't put the diary away. There was something oddly familiar about the name Tom Riddle. Like he was an old friend but that was absurd. He had never known anyone by that name. Harry rechecked the trophy room and, though he didn't find anything else on the shield, he did find Riddle's name on an old Medal for Magical Merit and on a list of old Head Boys.

Determined to boost student moral, Lockhart decided to hold a Valentine's Day event on February 14th. The day started with him embarrassing Professor Flitwick with a few comments while making Snape wish he could force-feed poison to Lockhart.

Easter came and it was time to sign up for their new classes. Harry, on the advice of Sirius, Remus, and Tonks, signed up for Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. Hermione, initially, had planned on signing up for everything but reconsidered when Harry said, "Tonks told me that the Divination teacher is a crock who does nothing except predict the deaths of her students. And the Muggle studies professor has probably never seen a Muggle in his life."

Hermione, in the end, signed up for the same subjects as Harry.

On the day of the next Quidditch Match (this time against Hufflepuff), McGonagall came onto the pitch carrying a purple megaphone

"This match has been cancelled!" she called out and there were instantly shouts of protest. "All students are to return to their dormitories at once!" She then turned to Harry. "You had better come with me, Potter!"

McGonagall led Harry through the hallways to the infirmary.

"There has been another double attack," she said. Harry saw in horror two girls laying Petrified on the beds. One of them was Hermione. "They were found near the library," McGonagall said. "This was found with them; does it mean anything to you?" she held up a small circular mirror. Harry shook his head. "I will escort you

back to Gryffindor Tower," McGonagall said. 'I need to address the students.'

Please review, with thanks to my beta witowsmp

JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter Eight

### The Chamber of Secrets

That night, Harry snuck out under his invisibility cloak and went to Hagrid's hut, thinking he might be able to give some information on what could be going on, considering he was at Hogwarts the last time the Chamber was open. He had barely arrived before he was forced to hide again. Minister Fudge arrived with Dumbledore. Fudge announced that he was taking Hagrid away 'for his safety'. Moments later, Lucius Malfoy arrived with a petition signed by the governors of the school suspending him. Hagrid, before he was taken away, said something about 'following the spiders.' Harry remembered seeing the spiders all around the castle.

In Herbology, Ernie Macmillan formally apologized for accusing him of attacking Justin and even hinted that he thought that Malfoy was responsible. It was then that he saw the spiders. They were heading in the general direction of the Forbidden Forest. In Defence Against the Dark Arts, Harry was sickened by Lockhart's comments that he had known that Hagrid was the perpetrator all along and confidence that the whole thing was over.

That night, Harry, again under the cover of his invisibility cloak, snuck out of the castle. After dropping his cloak off at Hagrid's hut, and silencing Fang with some treacle fudge, he said "Lumos", creating a small light at the tip of his wand, and started heading into the Forest. It took him about twenty minutes of stumbling around before he found the spiders and followed them. Half-an hour later, Harry came upon hundreds of large spiders. One of them picked him up and carried him some distance before finally dropping him.

"Aragog!" the spider called out, "Aragog!"

From the middle of a misty, domed web, came a spider the size of a small elephant. It had a black and grey body and legs and milky white eyes.

"What is it?" Aragog clicked

"A man" the spider clicked back



"Is it Hagrid?"

"A Stranger."

"Kill him" clicked Aragog "I was sleeping..."

"I'm a friend of Hagrid" Harry quickly said. There was a lot of clicking.

Finally, Aragog said "Hagrid has never sent anyone sent a man into our hollow before."

"Hagrid's in trouble," Harry said "That's why I've come."

"In trouble?" Aragog clicked "But why has he sent you?"

"They think, up at the school, that Hagrid's been setting a...something on students. They've taken him to Azkaban." Aragog clicked his pincers furiously and the sound was echoed by the other spiders.

"But that was years ago" said Aragog "Years and years ago. I remember it well. That's why they made him leave the school. They believed that I was the monster that dwells in what they call the Chamber of Secrets. They thought Hagrid opened the Chamber and set me free!"

"And you...you didn't come from the Chamber of Secrets?"

"I!" Aragog said angrily "I was not born in the castle. I came from a distant land. A traveller gave me to Hagrid when I was an egg. Hagrid was only a boy, but he cared for me, hidden in a cupboard in the castle, feeding me scraps from the table. Hagrid is my good friend and a good man. When I was discovered and blamed for the death of a girl, he protected me. I have lived here in the forest, ever since. Hagrid still visits me. He even found me a wife, Mosag, and you see how our family has grown thanks to Hagrid's goodness..."

"So...you never attacked anyone?"

"Never" the old spider croaked "It would've been my instinct, but out of respect for Hagrid, I never harmed a human. The body of the girl who was killed was discovered in a bathroom. I never saw any part

of the castle except the cupboard in which I grew up. Our kind like the dark and quiet..."

"So what did kill the girl?"

"The thing that lives in the castle is an ancient enemy we spiders fear above all others. Well, do I remember how I pleaded with Hagrid to let me go when I sensed the beast moving about the school."

"But what is it?"

"We do not speak of it" Aragog said in a fierce tone "We do not name it! I never even told Hagrid the name of that dread creature, even though he asked me many times." Harry wisely decided not to press the issue, what with the spiders closing in on him and all. Aragog started going back to his web

"I'll just go now" Harry said

"Go?" Aragog said "I think not."

"But..."

"My sons and daughters do not harm Hagrid on my command, but I cannot deny them fresh meat, when it wanders so willingly into our midst. Goodbye, friend of Hagrid." Harry reached for his wand

"Arania Exumai," he bellowed, knocking back one of the spiders. However, as there was a nearly solid wall of them, this did absolutely nothing except make them angrier. Harry tried something else

"Arania Exumai Maximus!" Harry was engulfed by white light that threw back all the spiders in front of Harry. He made a run for it, casting that spell again as needed. By the time he reached Hagrid's hut, he was exhausted, both from the running and the spell casting.

"Follow the spiders, he says." Harry said, shaking his head, "Well, at least I learned that Hagrid was framed." He grabbed his cloak and snuck back to his dormitory. Harry lay down to sleep and suddenly bolted up.

Of course! Harry thought, the girl died in a bathroom. What if she never left?

He, unfortunately, could not put his theory to the test. It had been hard enough sneaking away to follow the spiders. Sneaking away to go into a girl's bathroom was an entirely different matter. Not only that, but exams were coming up.

Three days before their first exam, Professor McGonagall announced that the Mandrakes were ready for cutting. In just a few hours, everyone who had been Petrified would be set right again.

Even so, Harry wasn't about to pass up the chance to talk to Myrtle if the opportunity came up. And it did when Gilderoy Lockhart was escorting them to History of Magic. It did not take much to persuade him to go back to his classroom. Just as Harry separated from the group, however, he ran into McGonagall.

"Mr. Potter, what are you doing?" Harry thought quickly

"I want to go see, Hermione." he said, "It's been ages since I saw her." Professor McGonagall stared at him for a moment before speaking in a croaky voice

"Of course" she said and a tear glistened in her eyes "Of course, I realize that this has all been hardest on the friends of those who have been...I quite understand. Yes, Mr. Potter, you may go visit Miss Granger. I will inform Professor Binns where you've gone. Tell Madam Pomfrey that you have my permission." Harry nodded and quickly walked away, unable to believe his good luck. He would just drop by the hospital wing for a few minutes and then go to Myrtle's bathroom.

Harry's eyes went wide when he saw a piece of paper in Hermione's hand. After making sure that Madam Pomfrey was not looking, he started working on it. After several tense minutes, he finally got it out. It was a page torn from a library book. When he read it, it was like a light bulb going on in his head.

It's all starting to make sense now. Harry still had no idea as to the identity of the attacker, but that did not matter as he now knew what the monster was and how it was getting around. Harry immediately

left the hospital wing and headed towards the staff room. Suddenly he heard McGonagall's voice echoing through the corridors.

"All students are to return to their dormitories at once! All teachers return to the staffroom! Immediately, please!"

Oh no! Harry thought. Not another attack! Harry reached the staff room and hid himself in the wardrobe. McGonagall explained that Ginny had been taken by the monster into the Chamber and that they would have to send all the students home. At that very moment, Lockhart burst in and, before he knew it, had been conscripted to go into the Chamber to rescue her.

Lockhart stammered: "V-Very well," he said, "I'll...I'll be in my office, getting...getting ready." With that, Lockhart left the room. McGonagall dismissed the rest of the staff. When the staff room was empty, Harry left and went after Lockhart. He found the Defence teacher rapidly packing.

"Going somewhere, Professor?" Harry smirked.

"Err...well...yes," Lockhart said, "Urgent call...unavoidable..."

"I don't think so," Harry said, raising his wand, "I always knew you were a fraud!" Lockhart merely shrugged and then went for his wand.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry said, disarming Lockhart and blasting him across the room. Harry put Lockhart's wand in his pocket.

"What do you want me to do?" Lockhart said, "I don't know where the Chamber of Secrets is. There's nothing I can do."

"You're in luck," Harry said as he forced Lockhart upright, "I have a pretty good idea where it is and what's inside it. Let's go." Harry marched Lockhart to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

"Oh, it's you," Myrtle said, "What do you want?"

"To ask you how you died." Myrtle's whole aspect changed at once.

"Oooh, it was terrible," she said, "It happened right in here. I died in this very stall. I remember it so well. I'd hidden because Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses. The door was locked and

I was crying. And then, I heard somebody come in. He said something funny...a different language I think...Anyway, he was a boy. So I unlocked the door, to tell him to go and use his own toilet and then...I died."

"How?"

"No idea," Myrtle said, "I just remember seeing a pair of great, big yellow eyes. My whole body seized up and then I was floating away...and then I came back. I was determined to haunt Olive Hornby..."

"Just where did you see the eyes?" Harry impatiently interrupted. Myrtle huffed and pointed at the sink in front of the toilet.

"Somewhere over there." Harry carefully examined the sink and saw that one of the taps had a tiny snake on it.

"That one's never worked." Myrtle said as he tried to turn it. Harry focused on the tiny snake and willing himself to believe that it was alive. He moved his head so that the candlelight made it look as though it were moving.

"Open up!" Harry hissed in Parseltongue. Lockhart gaped as the tap shone with a brilliant white light and began to spin. The sink moved and sank out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed.

Harry pushed Lockhart in first and then went after him. Harry found himself on the damp floor of a dark stone tunnel and stood, saying "Lumos" to provide some light. Just as they came across a giant snake skin, Lockhart tackled him, taking back his wand, though he was holding it backwards.

"The adventure ends here," Lockhart said, "I'll just take this up to the school and say that you tragically lost your mind at the sight of her body. Lockhart raised his wand and yelled

"Obliviate!"

Unfortunately, since he was holding the wand backwards, the charm affected him instead of Harry. Harry merely shook his head. He was getting in the way, anyway, Harry thought and left a memory less Lockhart behind and reached a solid stone wall on which, two

entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with emeralds. Harry did not have to imagine that these snakes were real as they looked quite authentic to him.

"Open." Harry hissed and the serpents parted as the wall cracked open. Harry walked inside.

Harry found Ginny Weasley lying next to a pond with the diary next to her.

"You're not." Harry said.

"Not what?" Tom Riddle demanded.

"Not the greatest sorcerer in the world" Harry said, "Power isn't the only thing that matters..."

"Power is the only thing that matters!" Tom said, "There is only power and those too afraid to grasp it."

"Then why is your present day self a disembodied spirit?" Harry said, "No Tom, Friendship and loyalty are far more important..." Riddle spat at him.

"Worthless attributes..." he said and paused when he saw a phoenix flying towards them, singing a song that warmed his heart and carrying the Sorting Hat. Riddle began to laugh again as the phoenix dropped the hat at Harry's feet and landed on his shoulder.

"So this is what Dumbledore sends his champion? The Sorting Hat and a songbird?" Harry shook his head, the phoenix, whoever it was, wasn't Fawkes. He didn't know how he knew, he just did. Harry picked up the Hat and, without thinking, put his hand in it. He felt his hand close on something metal and smiled.

"No, Tom. This is what Godric Gryffindor sends his heir!" With that, he pulled his hand out of the Hat. It was holding a silver sword with rubies encrusted in the handle. The words Godric Gryffindor were engraved just below the hilt. The sword felt surprisingly light and easy to handle. Harry thrust it into Tom and it passed right through him. Riddle laughed.

"Is that the best you can do?" Harry started to go towards the diary but paused when Riddle raised the wand.

"How did you survive? Tell me how?"

"My mother died to save me." Harry simply replied.

"Ahh...yes...yes, that would be a powerful countercharm...I can see it now. There is nothing special about you, after all. I had wondered, you see. There are strange likenesses between you and me. Both of us are half-bloods, orphans, descendants of one of the Founders. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even look something alike...but after, all, it was merely a lucky chance that saved you from me. That's all I wanted to know." Tom's twisted smile was widening.

"Now let us match the powers of Lord Voldemort, Heir of Salazar Slytherin, against famous Harry Potter, Heir of Gryffindor." With that, Riddle hissed at the stone face of Slytherin.

"Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four". The gigantic stone face was moving. The mouth opened to make a huge black hole. And inside it, something stirred and slithered up from its depths.

Harry hissed in Parseltongue: "Retreat!"

Tom merely laughed. "The Basilisk only obeys me, Potter!" he said. Harry backed away until he hit the wall and closed his eyes. The phoenix left his shoulder and took flight. He heard Riddle hiss "Kill him!"

The basilisk began moving towards Harry, who began running blindly sideways only to suddenly trip, causing Tom to laugh even harder. Harry suddenly heard a sound and opened his eyes just in time to see the phoenix blind the basilisk.

"NO!" Riddle screamed, "LEAVE THE BIRD, KILL THE BOY! YOU CAN STILL SMELL HIM, KILL HIM!" the basilisk swayed, still confused, but no less deadly.

"KILL THE BOY! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE BOY IS BEHIND YOU! SNIFF...SMELL HIM!"

The basilisk coiled and lunged blindly. Harry dodged and it hit the Chamber wall. The snake lunged again and Harry felt its forked tongue lash his side. He raised his sword in both of his hands. The basilisk lunged yet again and this time Harry threw his whole weight behind the sword and drove it into the roof of the serpent's mouth. But, even as warm blood drenched his arm, Harry felt a searing pain just above his elbow. A fang was sinking into his arm and splintered as the basilisk fell sideways. Harry pulled the fang out, but knew that it was too late. He fell to the ground and his vision started going foggy. The phoenix flew up to Harry and began crying on the wound.

Voldemort began gloating about how he had finally defeated Harry Potter and Harry noticed that the pain was starting to leave him and that the Chamber was coming back into focus. Harry looked at his arm and saw no wound.

"Get away, bird!" said Riddle suddenly "Get away from him...I said, get away!" Riddle pointed Harry's wand at the phoenix. There was a bang that sounded like a gunshot and the phoenix took flight again.

"Phoenix tears...of course...healing powers...I forgot." Tom looked at Harry.

"But it makes no difference; I prefer it this way, just you and me..." Just then, Harry saw the phoenix drop the diary in Harry's lap. Harry, as if he'd been planning to do it all along, grabbed the fang and stabbed the diary with it. There was a long, piercing scream and ink began spurting out of the diary, covering Harry's hands and flooding the floor. Riddle writhed, twisted, flailed and screamed. And then suddenly, he was gone.

Some time later, Ginny left McGonagall's office with her parent's. McGonagall took Lockhart to the infirmary and Dumbledore turned to Harry. He had no clue how Harry had summoned a phoenix, but he had and the fact that it hadn't been Fawkes concerned him greatly and threatened to ruin his carefully laid plans even more.

Ever since the prophecy had been made, Dumbledore had carefully arranged the circumstances so that both Harry and Neville would qualify and then used memory and compulsion charms to convince the Potters and the Longbottoms to change their Secret-Keepers to people he knew were traitors in order to get the prophecy in motion



and had ensured, through Snape, that Voldemort would only know the first half of the prophecy. That part of the plan had worked perfectly.

Voldemort had gone after Harry himself and sent the Lestrangle's after Neville. Everything had gone to hell when Sirius had snatched Harry away from Hagrid and Dumbledore now admitted that he had compounded the problem by his repeated attempts to get Sirius's location out of Harry. I should've anticipated that he would teach Harry Occlumency. That was what had really screwed things up. No matter, I'll just accelerate the portions of my original plan that remain intact.

Dumbledore was not at all pleased by Harry's close relationship with Hermione because she was too strong willed. Ginny Weasley, on the other hand, was perfect for his purposes. Oh, this would be so much simpler if Harry didn't need a romantic interest to kill Voldemort. Unfortunately, that was how Harry's magic worked. He needed love, of any kind, in order to be powerful and the more love he had, the more powerful he was. This was precisely why Dumbledore had wanted Harry to be raised by his muggle relatives. He couldn't afford Harry getting too powerful too quickly because then he'd be hard to get rid of afterwards...

Unfortunately, thanks to Sirius, that was now out of his hands. Then, of course, there's always plan B. Dumbledore, however, was not yet at the stage where he wanted to start using love potions since they didn't actually create love, just a very powerful obsession. Then again, there were ways around even that... Harry interrupted his musings when he spoke.

"Tom said that we were alike, and I guess, in many ways we are. We're both descendants of one of the Founders, both Parselmouths, heck we even look something alike." Harry paused for a moment.

"But, we are also very different. I, unlike him, was raised in an environment of love and caring."

Harry paused to glare at Dumbledore, implying that if he had been at the Dursley's, Harry's childhood probably wouldn't have been so rosy. "And we are also in different Houses and have different ambitions."

"Very good, Harry." Dumbledore reluctantly said. He would've preferred Harry being a little more clueless, but had to admit that brains could be useful, if properly harnessed. "Do you know why the Hat put you in Gryffindor?"

"Because I asked it to."

"Exactly," Dumbledore said, "Our choices define who we are, far more than our abilities."

"Yes," Harry said and suddenly smiled, "And judging by the choices I have seen you make so far, I must say that my opinion of you is...rather low to say the least."

Dumbledore didn't even miss a beat.

"My intentions really were for the best, Harry," he said, "Your protection was absolutely paramount to me..."

"Oh come on, headmaster," Harry said, "If you really were that concerned about my safety, then you would've had Sirius cleared of those ridiculous charges earlier and put his house under the Fidelius charm with you as the Secret-Keeper."

Dumbledore said nothing, realizing that Harry had the upper hand on him at the moment.

"I will kill Voldemort," Harry said as he stood up, "But I will do it under my terms and on my time or not at all." After Harry had left, Dumbledore started writing a letter to the Weasleys.

Dobby was profoundly grateful at being freed – with a sock and the partly destroyed diary, Harry tricked Lucius Malfoy into freeing him.

"I'd better go," Harry said, "There's a feast to go to and Hermione should be awake by now."

Dobby smiled and hugged Harry. "Harry Potter is greater by far than Dobby knew," he sobbed, "Farewell, Harry Potter!" Dobby then disappeared with a loud crack and Harry went to the Great Hall. Hermione came running to him and threw her arms around him.

"You solved it!" she screamed, "You solved it!"

"I couldn't have done it without you." Harry replied.

McGonagall then stood and announced that Harry's two hundred points had secured Gryffindor the House Cup for the second year running and that exams were cancelled as a school treat. Many teachers along with the students cheered when Dumbledore said that Lockhart would not be returning the next year. Hagrid then came busting through the door.

"Sorry, I'm late," he said, "the owl that delivered my release got all lost and confused." It was then that Harry noticed Ron tentatively walking towards him.

"I just want to say, thank you for saving my sister's life," Ron said. "She...uh...means a lot to me."

Harry nodded. He hoped that this was a genuine attempt at friendship and not one of Dumbledore's schemes.

"I was wondering if, maybe, you wanted to come visit my house over the summer?"

"We'll see," Harry said. On the one hand, he didn't want to turn down Ron's offer if it was genuine and on the other, he needed to be constantly on guard. Ron nodded, thanked Harry again, and walked off.

"Unusual to see him not following Neville around like a lost puppy?" Harry said.

"Well," Hermione said "You're alive and...marked so there's no reason for Dumbledore to promote Neville anymore."

"Which is why I'm worried," Harry said. There was a long pause. Hermione finally broke it with

"What are you going to name your phoenix?"

Harry looked at the bird perched on his shoulder.

"To be honest, I'm not sure yet," he said, "Also, I'm worried that Hedwig might get jealous."

The phoenix trilled something that, to Harry anyway, sounded like "She won't be."

"So, where exactly, did you come from?" Harry asked, "Not that I'm complaining, but..."

"It is common for a phoenix to bond with a Light Lord," the bird trilled, "Just as Dark Lords bond with dark creatures, most often serpents, though there have been others. Albus Dumbledore was once a Light Lord, though today he would be best classified as a Grey Lord."

"Then why is Fawkes still with him?" Hermione asked, apparently also understanding the phoenix.

"Because a phoenix bond can only be broken by death."

"I see," Harry said, "But I am not a Light Lord..."

"Not yet..." Harry could've sworn that he heard the phoenix laughing.

"Do you have a name?" he asked

"Aeled." The phoenix trilled.

At Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , Harry bid goodbye to Hermione and then went over to Sirius.

"Where'd you get the phoenix?" Sirius asked.

"It's a long story, I'll explain at home."

Sirius apparated them to his house. Harry then told him, Remus, and Tonks, what had happened, leaving nothing out except his conversation with Aeled. He really wasn't sure what to make of the whole 'Light Lord' business and wanted to keep it a secret for the time being. He could trust Hermione not to tell anyone and she was probably just as baffled as he was. When Harry finished there was a long pause.

Finally, Sirius said "You must really have a pure heart to be able to summon and bond with a phoenix."

"Well that's essentially what Aeled told me" Harry said, earning what looked like an amused glare from the bird.

Please review, with thanks to my beta

As usual, JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter 9

Harry came walking into the living room and was startled by shouts of: "Surprise!"

Sirius, Remus, Tonks, her family, Hermione and her parents were all there, along with a very large cake that had thirteen candles on it.

"Make a wish, Harry," Sirius said. Harry smiled, thought for a moment, and then blew out the candles to applause.

"What'd you wish for?" Remus asked.

"Can't tell," Harry said as he cut the cake, "Otherwise it won't come true." He had wished for a normal school year. A year in which he was not in any danger of dying and could spend his time like a normal thirteen year old boy, with nothing to worry about except for Quidditch, school work and maybe asking Hermione to be his girlfriend.

Of course, I'll have to continue training for my inevitable confrontation with Voldemort, but aside from that, I want it to be as normal as possible.

There was momentary burst of flame and a phoenix settled on one of Harry's shoulders and trilled a greeting even as Hedwig landed on the other and hooted softly. Harry smiled and petted each in turn. It had taken Hedwig some time adjusting to the fact that she was no longer Harry's only familiar, but she now seemed content. The two birds then flew over to the custom perches Harry had gotten them.

Harry took a bite of cake and started opening his presents. He tore open the one from Sirius first and his eyes went watery when he saw that it was a Firebolt.

"I-I really don't know what to say," said Harry, "Thank you so much." Harry gave a Sirius a hug and then said: "Well, now I know what to give Hermione for her birthday."

Hermione huffed in mock indignation. "You'd better have a lot more for me than just your old Nimbus..."

"Oh don't worry," Harry said with just a hint of sarcasm, "I've got the purchase of Flourish and Blotts all lined up... oops, I shouldn't have said that!" Everyone enjoyed a good laugh and Harry opened his present from Remus. It was an envelope. Harry opened it and read the letter inside:

Dear Mr. Lupin,

I am pleased to inform you that you have accepted at the position of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Congratulations, Professor. I look forward to seeing you in the autumn.

Albus Dumbledore

Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,

Order of Merlin First Class and Grand Sorcerer,

Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards,  
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot

"Wow," Harry said "This is good news, Remus, or should I say, Professor?"

"Only at school," Remus said, "And don't expect me to show you favouritism."

"I don't," Harry said, "It's hard enough putting up with Snape's bias." Tonks gave Harry a diary to write in (thankfully, it was nothing like Voldemort's diary), Hermione gave him the wizarding equivalent of a friendship bracelet.

"I have one too," she said, "Now we will always know where the other is and if they're in danger."

Harry smiled at her gift and gave her a quick hug. Just as Harry felt that nothing could ruin this perfect day, an owl flew in with the Daily Prophet.

Bellatrix Lestrange escapes from Azkaban

Convicted Death Eater Bellatrix Lestrange has escaped from Azkaban. The public is warned that she is very dangerous and to be avoided at all costs. Minister Fudge has deployed a large force of Aurors and Hit-Wizards to track her down. The Dementors have been ordered to Kiss Lestrange on sight. Minister Fudge has also announced that a force of Dementors will be deployed to protect Hogwarts...

There was a list of her crimes and her family history following the article.

The letters from Hogwarts arrived several days later. Harry, Remus and Sirius met Hermione and her parents in Diagon Alley. After getting the books and refills of ink, fresh Hogwarts approved parchment, etc, Hermione's parents took her to a pet shop and she came out carrying a brown tawny owl.

"What happened to Crookshanks?" Harry asked, having brought her the cat for her birthday last year.

"He had to go through the wizarding equivalent of neutering." she said, "I can't take him to a Muggle vets now, can I?" Before they could return home, Harry slipped away to both Gringotts and Flourish and Blotts. Something about a rumour he heard and wanted to do something about it.

Harry was sorely tempted not to take the Hogwarts Express as Aeled could take them to Hogwarts in an instant. Unfortunately, it would also give Snape an excuse to give them detention and so Harry and Hermione boarded the Hogwarts Express on Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  and found a compartment where Remus was slumbering peacefully and sat down. On the way, they saw Neville and Ron acting as if they owned the train and tried to make people curtsey them, once or twice, they threatened to set Ron's brother Percy on them – he was the new Head Boy – if they didn't bow. Needless to say, the two were soon pranked by Fred and George Weasley.

Crookshanks came out of the basket and settled on Hermione's lap where she began petting him. The ride seemed to stretch on for an eternity and suddenly the train began slowing for no explainable reason finally coming to a stop with a jolt. Remus still contentedly snored; he was a very heavy sleeper. The lights went out, plunging



them into total darkness. Harry and Hermione both said "Lumos" illuminating the tips of their wands.

It wasn't much, but enough to see what happened next. The compartment door opened, revealing a tall, cloaked figure standing there. Harry felt an intense cold come over him, like he could never be cheerful again. He felt unusually weak, the cold seemed to be drowning him and Harry could distantly hear someone screaming. Just then, Professor Lupin awoke and said:

"You will not find Lestrage here, begone!"

The creature did not move and so Remus muttered "Expecto Patronum!"

A large silver something erupted out of his wand and charged the Dementor, driving it out of the compartment. Harry shook his head, as if trying to clear it.

"What was that?" he asked.

"A Dementor," Remus said, giving each of them some pieces of chocolate, "Eat this, you'll feel better." Harry took a bite of the chocolate and was amazed when he really did feel better.

"What was that spell you used, Professor?" Hermione asked.

"The Patronus Charm," Lupin said, "It's the only spell which works against Dementors."

"Can you teach me it?" Harry asked.

"The Patronus Charm is extremely complex magic," Lupin said, "The great majority of the wizarding population lacks the strength to properly conjure a Patronus. Furthermore, I have been assured that the Dementors will only be guarding the entrances to Hogwarts, so as long as you stay away from them..."

"No arguments here Professor." Harry said.

Harry stepped off the carriages and heard Malfoy say: "I heard Longbottom say that you fainted, Potter. Is that true?"

"Longbottom wasn't even in the compartment," Harry said, "So he wouldn't know what happened anyway. And, no I didn't faint though I did very distinctly hear you screaming." Malfoy flushed slightly and walked hastily to the castle.

In the Great Hall, after the Sorting, Dumbledore stood to make some announcements:

"Until Bellatrix Lestrange is dead or recaptured, Hogwarts will be playing host to a force of Dementors. They will be stationed at all the school entrances and are not fooled by glamour charms, disguises, or even Invisibility Cloaks." Dumbledore paused with a glance at Harry.

"On a happier note, I am pleased to welcome two new teachers to our ranks this year. First, Professor Lupin, who has kindly consented to fill the post of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher."

There was scattered applause. Only Harry and Hermione clapped enthusiastically, already knowing that they were going to have a competent teacher for once unlike that idiot ponce Lockhart or Qurrilmort.

"As to our second new appointment," Dumbledore continued, "I am sorry to inform you that Professor Kettleburn, our Care of Magical Creatures teacher, retired at the end of last year in order to enjoy more time with his remaining limbs. And so, I would like to introduce our new Care of Magical Creatures teacher, Professor Grubbly-Plank."

After more scattered applause, the feast began. Afterwards, the prefects led them to their towers. After writing in his diary, Harry went to sleep.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter 10

At breakfast the following morning, Professor McGonagall distributed the schedules. Then the Daily Prophet was delivered. Hermione almost had a fit when she saw the headlines:

Flourish and Blotts go bust!

It has been announced today that following a lawsuit, the bookshop Flourish and Blotts has been declared bankrupt. The shop was sued for selling books sold by Gilderoy Lockhart, who was announced to be a fraud. Their defence that they did not know he didn't do what he claimed to and it was not their fault Hogwarts set the books for the Defence lessons wasn't accepted and the shop was fined 2 million galleons which would be distributed to those who had brought the books.

Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, who hired Gilderoy Lockhart the previous year as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, who set his entire published works for the class had no comment to make.

Hermione looked shocked as she read the story. After breakfast, she and Harry went to Arithmancy first.

"Arithmancy," Professor Vector said, "is not just about the magical properties of numbers, it is the math behind the spells. An Arithmancer can not only break down spells into their Arithmantic formulas and back again, but also modify them and produce entirely new spells."

Transfiguration was after Arithmancy. McGonagall was telling them about Animagi. Harry and Hermione already knew all about that, being Animagi themselves. And so they were not at all amazed when McGonagall turned into her tabby cat form and back again (Sirius told them that McGonagall was an animagus). The rest of the class were also unimpressed, but for a different reason.

"Really, what's gotten into you all today?" Professor McGonagall said, "Not that it matters, but that's the first time my transformation hasn't gotten applause from a class."

Ron raised his hand: "We just had Divination and..."

"Ahh...of course," McGonagall said, "Who's going to be dying this year?" Neville tentatively put his hand up.

"You should know that Sybil Trelawney has predicted the death of a one student a year since she arrived at this school. So far, none of them has died yet. Seeing death omens is merely her way of greeting a new class. Were it not for the fact that I never speak ill of my colleagues..." McGonagall broke off and calmed down before continuing, "Divination is probably the most imprecise branch of magic there is. I have very little patience with it. True Seers are very rare and Professor Trelawney..."

McGonagall stopped again. Harry smiled slightly, already having a pretty good idea of what she had been about to say. Tonks had warned him about her years ago from her time at Hogwarts (what Harry hadn't told Hermione was that during Tonks' first (and only) lesson with Trelawney, her death was predicted.

"You seem to be in fine health, Mr. Longbottom so forgive me if I don't let you off on your homework. If you die, you won't have to turn it in." Harry and Hermione chuckled at this but they were the only people to do so.

"Ancient Runes is the study of the meanings and magical properties of runes," Professor Quasart said, "Rune magic can be very powerful if used properly and is most often seen in rituals and some wards. You must know not only how to interpret the runes, but also how to write them."

Thursday afternoon, in Defence Against the Dark Arts, Lupin had taken them to the staff room for a practical lesson.

"Can anyone tell me what a Boggart is?" Lupin asked - Harry and Hermione's hands shot into the air.

"Yes, Miss. Granger?"

"It's a shapeshifter that uses a kind of Legilimency to learn what our worst fear is and then takes that shape."

"Excellent, Miss. Granger. 5 points to Gryffindor for such an advanced answer." Lupin then taught them how to force a Boggart to assume a funny shape and selected Neville for a demonstration. The Boggart assumed the form of Snape and Neville was able to force it to change so that Snape was now wearing his grandmother's clothes. Everyone laughed at it and then got into a line. One by one all the students walked forward to deal with the Boggart except for Harry and Hermione, who Lupin prevented from participating. After the rest of the class had left, Harry asked Lupin

"Why didn't you let me tackle the Boggart, Professor?" Remus took a deep breath.

"I guess I just assumed that it would take the shape of Voldemort, which of course would've panicked everyone and ruined the point of the class."

"Actually, I'm not scared of Voldemort," Harry said. No, when he thought his worst fear, the first thing that came to mind was the Dementor back on the train.

It was not long before Defence Against the Dark Arts became everyone's favorite class. Everyone that is, except Draco Malfoy.

"Do you know that I heard that Lupin lives with Potter?" he said one day in a loud voice, "His favoritism is so obvious..."

"Professor Lupin doesn't show me favouritism," Harry said, "And even if he did, you're not one to talk." Harry then coughed something that sounded very much like "Snape."

Hermione's birthday came on the 19th and a huge surprise came for her. An owl dropped some important papers in front of her. She opened the envelope and read them. They told her that she was now the new owner of Flourish and Blotts. She turned to Harry with a glare – he was the only one she knew who would do such a thing.

"Hey," he said, "I heard they were having serious problems and decided to buy the shop for you. The original staff have been kept on until you decide otherwise."

Hermione gave him a big hug to say thank you.

The next several weeks were uneventful except for the fact that Harry noticed that he seemed to be paying more attention to Ginny. He was also having some difficulty concentrating and meditating for Occlumency.

Everything changed on Halloween when Bellatrix Lestrange tried to break into Gryffindor tower. She only succeeded in ripping the Fat Lady's canvas, but the Fat Lady had lost all nerve and so a portrait of an insane knight named Sir Cadogan had been put up as a temporary guardian. Neville was totally freaked out and began furtively glancing around wherever he went.

As usual, Harry and Hermione weren't at school during Halloween, they were making their annual ritual visit to James and Lily Potter's graves.

The day before the Quidditch match against Slytherin was the full moon, so Harry and Hermione were not surprised that Lupin was not in class. They were however, surprised to see that Snape was his temporary replacement. The lesson was on werewolves, but Snape's teaching style meant that they learned absolutely nothing and lost a number of points for no reason. But Harry and Hermione already knew a lot about werewolves and so they didn't suffer due to Snape's teaching, except for the loss of points.

In the locker room the following day, the entire team was wondering what was in a trunk Harry was carrying. Wood tried not to smile. He and Lee Jordan were the only other people who knew but finally, during his pep talk, Wood suddenly broke out into a grin and said "Harry, it's time to show them."

Harry nodded, he had a grin even broader than Wood's and carted the trunk forward. He opened it to reveal six brand new Firebolts. The entire team was speechless.

The twins were the first to recover their voices and Harry cut them off.

"I wrote to the Firebolt Broom Company over the summer and they agreed to provide the Gryffindor Quidditch team with Firebolts. All you have to do in return is to send them feedback on the broom and tell them how much you like it, and possibly, agree to pose for publicity photos for their adverts."

The girls, Angelina, Alicia, and Katie, all hugged him ecstatically. Harry tapped his glasses with his wand and said "Impervious". The team then proudly carried their brooms out onto the Quidditch Pitch.

Even in the pouring rain, it was easy to tell that the Slytherins were in shock at seeing the Firebolts.

"Where did you get those?" Malfoy demanded.

"Contrary to what you may think, Malfoy," Harry said, "People don't only donate to Slytherin."

"Even the Potters couldn't have afforded seven Firebolts." Malfoy said.

"Actually, my Firebolt was a birthday present from my godfather, Sirius Black. As for the other six... they were donated by the Firebolt Broom Company, who seem to think Gryffindor deserve them more." Malfoy turned an interesting shade of green in envy. He was heard to say "My father..." as he left.

The game began and after the first goal by Katie, Lee Jordan said into the amplifier:

"And now I would like to thank the Firebolt Broom Company for their generous donation of six Firebolts to the Gryffindor team, kindly arranged by our very own Harry Potter. And since he was already on the team, he can't be accused of buying his place, unlike a certain Slytherin..."

McGonagall smacked him on the back of the head and Jordan got back to the commentary. The weather rapidly deteriorated and Harry was frantically chasing a tiny speck of gold against the wind. His task was made much harder by the fact that he was having trouble focusing. Suddenly an eerie silence settled over the stadium and Harry felt a familiar wave of cold sweep over him even though he was already soaked to the bone. He looked and saw at least a hundred Dementors standing beneath him.

Even my luck can't be that bad! Harry thought moments before he heard the voices.

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

"Stand aside, you silly girl... Stand aside now..."

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead..."

Harry realized, just before he fell off the broom, that he was hearing his mother's last words.

"Not Harry! Please have mercy...have mercy..."

The last thing Harry heard before he blacked out was a shrill voice laughing and a woman, his mother, screaming.

He awoke in the hospital wing and saw Hermione and the team minus Wood there. Hermione's eyes were bloodshot and she had been chewing her fingernails. They explained that Malfoy had caught the Snitch right after Harry had fallen. Fred reassured Harry that they didn't blame him for what happened and then the team left. Hermione then told Harry how Dumbledore had slowed his fall and driven off the Dementors. He had also ruled that because the Dementors were not supposed to be on the grounds, there was to be a replay, although Malfoy was trying to overrule it with his father's help.

"Nice to know that he's good for something," Harry muttered, "Though I really need to learn that Patronus Charm." Hermione nodded and then held up the Firebolt, it was still in one piece.

Madam Pomfrey insisted on keeping Harry in the hospital wing for the rest of the weekend. Hermione only left Harry's bedside at night. On Sunday, Ginny blushing gave him a get well card and a box of Chocolate Cauldrons, earning a sweet smile from Harry. Hermione frowned and lightly probed Ginny's mind.

Please review, with thanks to my betas



As usual, JKR owns HP, not me.

Continuing Jedipilot's Harry Black series, I find that besides the usual game of 'add-the-punctuation', there really isn't anything that needs changing or adding, besides the odd word or phrase here and there.

## Chapter Eleven

Hermione probed Ginny's mind and did not encounter any resistance. She quickly found the memory she was looking for.

"The potions aren't working," Ginny said, "He should be asking me out by now!"

"Potter appears to possess an innate resistance to mental influence that his training in Occlumency seems to have strengthened," Dumbledore said, "I will have the house-elves double the doses in his food. However, may I suggest a more aggressive approach on your part?" Dumbledore gave Ginny a box of Chocolate Cauldrons.

"He should be sufficiently influenced by now to accept them without comment or question."

It took all of Hermione's self control to keep from punching Ginny. After Ginny had left, Harry started to open the box and Hermione quickly grabbed it.

"What's the big idea?"

"These are tainted with love potions," Hermione said.

"Ginny would never do anything like that," Harry said, "She's so cute and..." Hermione quickly cast a Tongue-Tying charm on Harry so that he couldn't continue to babble about Ginny. After casting a Freezing charm to make sure that he wouldn't go anywhere, Hermione grabbed the two-way mirror and said: "Snuffles." Sirius's face appeared in the mirror.

"Hermione?"

"We have a problem," she said and then explained what she had learned from the memory.

"There are many kinds of love potions. Without knowing the exact one...I have an idea."

"What?" Sirius only smiled and his face vanished. Several minutes later, there was a burst of flame and Aeled flew in with Sirius.

"I'm going to have a little chat with the esteemed Potions master," Sirius said before walking out of the hospital wing. Sirius and Remus walked into Snape's office.

"You've got a lot of guts, coming here." Snape sneered.

"And you have a lot of guts making those love potions." Sirius said.

"I do not know what you are talking about."

"Hippogriff dung, you are the Potions master." Remus said.

"I am merely doing what the Headmaster tells me," Snape said, "And if it means I make potions to allow him to control students, then so be it."

"And I suppose that you've forgotten that your life-debt to James transferred to Harry when he died?" Sirius asked.

"I haven't forgotten." Snape said, "It torments me every day to be indebted to...him."

"Then get it off your head already," Sirius said.

"What are you talking about?"

"Give Harry the antidote," said Remus.

"And lose my job? I don't think so." Sirius ran his hands through his hair in frustration.

"For once in your life, Snivellus, do the right thing!" he said before storming out of the office. Remus gave Snape a cold look before he too left.

"How did it go?" Hermione asked.

"Not well," Sirius said, "We can't count on his help. I will go to Grimmauld Place and Potter Manor to see if there are other ways of counteracting love potions, but don't get your hopes up." With that, Sirius grabbed Aeled's tail feathers and the phoenix took off into another burst of flame. Hermione got her copy of Ancient Runes Made Easy, sat down on the bed next to Harry's and began reading.

Monday morning, Pomfrey discharged Harry from the hospital wing. Hermione kept a close eye on him as they went to Potions. Malfoy had become absolutely insufferable, mocking Harry at every turn and doing imitations of Dementors and of Harry falling off his broom. Harry, however, did not notice as his mind was too preoccupied with other things (mainly Ginny). He had such difficulty concentrating that he added the crocodile heart too soon. The potion began hissing and bubbling before it exploded, landing liquid everywhere. The liquid caused severe burns on all the people it touched and charred the floor of the dungeons. Snape scowled and deducted fifty points from Gryffindor after cleaning it up. He, however, was forced to admit that perhaps Sirius and Remus had had a point. Potter had never done this poorly in Potions before – although he never admitted it, Potter was one of the best students in his year, even better than Malfoy, after his marks were altered. In fact, even the Longbottom brat wasn't this bad. As the burnt students made their way to the hospital wing, Snape went to his private store and began brewing.

Madam Pomfrey scowled when she saw the students filling the hospital wing.

"Why don't you just get a permanent bed here?" she said to Harry. "What happened this time?"

Hermione explained what had happened and Pomfrey began applying anti-burn ointment.

Several hours later, Harry opened his eyes and saw Snape and Hermione standing over him.

"Potter, my debt is paid." Snape said before walking out. Harry saw that his mind was fresh and clear and Hermione whispered into Harry's ear what she had happened and what she had learned from

Ginny's mind. He looked and saw Dumbledore talking with Minister Fudge and struggled to his feet.

"Albus Dumbledore!" he said, "I hereby charge you with attempted Line theft!"

Dumbledore merely twinkled his eye and said to Fudge.

"See, I told you that he was still a little addled in the head from the poison."

"I'm not addled in the head, and it wasn't poison, it was love potion..." Dumbledore casually put a Freezing charm on Harry and floated him back to the bed. Harry and Hermione realized that Dumbledore was still far too powerful and influential for them to be able to do anything about him in the foreseeable future.

"I am not about to lose another game because of the Dementors," Harry said to Professor Lupin after his last class, "I want to learn the Patronus Charm."

"I figured that you were going to ask that. However, I am at a loss to explain why they are affecting you so badly. Certainly you lost your parents as a child but..." Remus shrugged and Harry nodded.

"I don't know either but I have to learn the charm."

"And I will start teaching you in my spare time, but first, I have to find a Boggart."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"To test something out."

In the weeks that passed, Ravenclaw flattened Hufflepuff in their Quidditch game in November. In the rematch, Gryffindor trashed Slytherin. Harry tried to press charges against both Dumbledore and the Weasleys and came up against an unsympathetic Wizengamot. And so he decided to let it go for the time being. There was no statute of limitations on Line theft anyway.

Harry was sleeping in his dormitory one night when he was startled by two words: "Avada Kedavra!"

Please review, with thanks to my betas

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

I've had a few people complain that I've been very cruel and that they hated me for leaving the last chapter on such a cliffhanger.

## Chapter 4

The jet of green light hit Harry's chest and Harry felt a searing pain in his scar unlike any he had ever experienced before. Then the green jet bounced off him and went in the direction of someone else. The lights came on and Harry saw that it was Bellatrix Lestrange. She had been snickering but when she saw that Harry was still alive....

"How is this possible?" she shrieked before turning into a vulture and flying out of the dormitory. The other boys, particularly Neville (the wall next to him was scorched from where the curse had hit), were absolutely pale. Harry looked at them as if surviving the Killing Curse was an everyday occurrence.

"What?" he said.

"How did you do that?" Neville asked.

"I have no clue."

Hermione didn't have a clue either and the library at Hogwarts was similarly uninformative. Even when she snuck into the Restricted Section under the cover of Harry's invisibility cloak, she couldn't find any book that might explain Harry's mysterious immunity to the Killing Curse.

Wood was now driving the team with a whip, determined to win the next game. The Dementors were, at the moment, staying at their posts. Harry had taken to casting detection charms on his food and drink, so far there had been no more potions, but Harry wasn't taking any more chances.

Albus Dumbledore was running out of ideas on how to gain control of Harry. Love potions either had no effect on Harry, or adversely affected him to the point where he couldn't function properly.

It's my fault for going overboard on the doses. He should've maintained the level of doses and forced Ginny to be more patient. Ahh...the joys of hindsight. Well, I can't use love potions anymore – he checks it now and his shields are strong enough to shrug off most Memory and Compulsion charms. Curse that Granger girl!

He had three more tricks up his sleeve. One would take a great deal of time to prepare, the second involved using brute force to penetrating Harry's Occlumency shields and the third was almost too terrible to even think about. Unfortunately, circumstances had forced his hand. There was an additional one – either expelling the Granger girl or transferring her to another school, but McGonagall wouldn't go along with it.

On the last weekend before the end of term, Harry and Hermione went Christmas shopping in Hogsmeade. While they were there, Harry, impelled by curiosity, overheard a conversation between McGonagall and Flitwick in which they discussed the Longbottom's betrayal. Harry, though he already knew about it, was still shocked to hear that Neville's parents hadn't been killed, but rather had been tortured into insanity by the Lestranges, Bellatrix in particular. When they got back, Ron asked Harry, for what was probably the millionth time.

"Do you want to play chess, Harry?" Harry sighed and probed Ron's mind.

"You must become Harry's friend," Dumbledore said, "I have to know what he is up to."

"How can I do that if he won't even talk to me?" Ron complained.

Sirius had decided to have this Christmas at Potter Manor. One day, Hermione was reading in the library when she suddenly jumped up and shouted. "That's it!"

"What?" Harry said, looking up from his homework.

"I've figured out how you survived." Hermione said, handing him a book titled Old Magic.

The Killing Curse is widely regarded as unblockable and unsurvivable, and while this is true almost all the time, there is one

rare exception. The Reverse-Death Spell is this exception. It can only be invoked as an act of last resort and out of love for the recipient, but if successfully done, the recipient will be protected from the Killing Curse for as long as they are alive. The caster must be very powerful and willing to give up their life for the recipient. This is why the caster cannot use the spell on themselves.

The protection granted by the Reverse Death Spell is bound up in that persons blood...

Harry looked up at Hermione: "Yes, this would explain how I survived. But it doesn't explain my scar or why Voldemort's body was destroyed while his soul remained."

"No," Hermione said, "But it's a start."

Classes resumed and Harry and Hermione began learning the Patronus Charm. Remus had found his Boggart and Harry's worst fear turned out to be a Dementor. This allowed for very realistic training as long as it focused on Harry, which fortunately was never much a problem. Progress was slow and tiring, but Harry had also learned that Occlumency could dilute some of a Dementors effects, though the more of them there were, the harder it was and the fact that he had to keep his shields down against the Boggart made the lessons even more realistic.

The game against Ravenclaw arrived and the Gryffindors proudly marched onto the field. Harry noticed that though the Ravenclaw seeker, Cho Chang, was pretty, there was something about Hermione...Hermione! Whoa back up there! She's my best friend, nothing more!

During the game, Harry saw three figures wearing cloaks approaching. Without even thinking, he pulled out his wand and said: "Expecto Patronum!"

Harry saw something silvery shoot out of his wand and head toward the figures, though he was too focused on the game to see what it was.

After an overwhelming victory by Gryffindor, Harry learned that they hadn't been Dementors, but instead were Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle



dressed up as Dementors. McGonagall furiously deducted fifty points from Slytherin and gave them detention.

That night, Harry had a strange dream. He was walking through a forest with his Firebolt, following something silvery-white, but he couldn't make out what it was. The next day, the Fat Lady's portrait was put back up and security trolls paced back and forth in front of it.

Easter came and so did a ton of homework from all their classes. Along with that, the Quidditch final was scheduled for next week and so Wood had increased the number of practices even more.

"It's only against Hufflepuff," Fred said.

"They have a really good team this year," Wood said, "And their Seeker, Cedric Diggory, is very good."

"Not as good as Harry," George said, "And that doesn't even count our brooms..."

"This is the Quidditch Final, we need to take it seriously."

"Okay," Fred said, "We're taking Hufflepuff very seriously. Seriously."

Harry was on his Firebolt rapidly scanning the sky for the Snitch. Cedric Diggory, had, it seemed, decided to watch Harry instead. And so Harry decided to teach him a lesson. He turned to look at the ground and suddenly dived. Diggory, thinking he'd seen the Snitch, followed. At the last minute, Harry pulled up and soared back to his observation point. Diggory realized he'd been suckered and tried to pull up too. Unfortunately, his slower broom couldn't do so in time and he crashed on the ground. Cedric Diggory furiously remounted his broom and flew up next to Harry.

"Nice move," he complimented.

"Thanks," Harry said and resumed his searching. Several minutes passed before he spied the Snitch near the Hufflepuff goal posts and took off after it, Diggory in hot pursuit. The Snitch flittered and began moving towards the grass. Diggory saw it and dived to cut Harry off. Harry swerved just in time to avoid a collision but he had lost sight of the Snitch. Several minutes later, he saw it again,

hovering at the opposite end of the field. Harry urged more and more speed out of his Firebolt and finally closed his fingers around the struggling Snitch.

"HARRY POTTER HAS CAUGHT THE SNITCH! GRYFFINDOR WINS, 300-60." Lee Jordan announced.

Harry landed and was instantly swarmed by the other Gryffindors in a group hug. The Gryffindors in the crowd came pouring onto the pitch. Harry decided to finally do it, he grabbed Hermione and gave her a full on kiss on the lips, causing quite a few whistles, 'ooohs' and cheers and even more catcalls. Ginny, Ron and Dumbledore gave the dirtiest looks they could. If Harry or Hermione could see them, they would have found out about their latest batch of plotting in order to force Harry to go along with someone Dumbledore approved of.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter Thirteen

Trevor had escaped again. Neville was running around the grounds looking for his toad when he suddenly found himself near the Shrieking Shack. A woman walked out of the dilapidated building. Neville instantly recognized her as Bellatrix Lestrange (Dumbledore had shown him picture after picture of her until he could recognise and draw her picture blindfolded) and started to raise his wand.

Bellatrix lazily said: "Crucio!" Neville fell to the ground, writhing in pain. Bellatrix put the spell on again and again, all the while taunting Neville, "Your parents begged me for mercy. Come on, little Neville. Beg for me!"

Another voice said: "Expelliarmus!" Bellatrix hastily put up a shield and saw that the newcomer was Harry Potter.

"Well, well. Potter! Let's see if you have some skill. Your parents certainly didn't!" With that, she snarled.

"Perimo!" A beam of yellow light erupted from her wand that Harry dodged.

"Petrificus Totalus!"

"Protego, Rector Nerolatum!" Harry ducked the orange beam and began rapidly firing a variety of hexes and interspersing them with wandless prank spells.

"Wandless magic, I'm impressed." Lestrange said, before sending a Bone-crushing hex at Harry that he barely dodged. Harry knew full well that he was only surviving because of his Quidditch reflexes and because Bellatrix was toying with him.

"Goodbye Potter, Avada..." The air suddenly went cold and dead. Harry and Bellatrix looked to see a hundred Dementors moving towards them. Bellatrix Lestrange turned into a vulture and took off into the air.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry said. His wand only produced a wisp of silvery vapor. Harry desperately tried to think of something happy.

"Expecto Patronum!" His wand produced more silver vapor. Suddenly, he heard Aeled's heart-warming song and the memory of winning the Quidditch final and kiss he and Hermione shared came to mind. Harry confidently yelled. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

A silver-white phoenix erupted out of his wand and hit one of the Dementors in the chest, knocking it back. The phoenix then began driving off the other Dementors. After they were gone, it landed in front of him and bowed before disappearing. The real Aeled landed on Harry's shoulder and trilled a greeting.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine, just a little tired," he said, "Thank you." Harry looked at Neville, who was a quivering mass on the ground. "Locomotor corpus." Harry said, flicking his wand and Neville's body floated up and followed Harry back to the castle and up to the infirmary. After Neville was under Madam Pomfrey's care, Dumbledore and McGonagall burst in.

"What happened?" Dumbledore said Harry calmly explained, in great detail, the fight with Lestrage and the Dementors arrival."

"How did you know he was out there?" Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling non-stop.

"I have my ways," Harry said and reinforced his shields. He wasn't about to let Dumbledore find out about the Marauders Map. He had been looking at it when he noticed Neville and Lestrage near the Shrieking Shack. McGonagall was impressed at Harry.

"You actually conjured a corporeal Patronus? That's an incredible feat for a third-year."

"Yes," Harry said, "Professor Lupin is a wonderful teacher."

Several days passed before Neville was conscious again. Harry, seeing a potential opportunity, visited him in the infirmary.

"If you want my gratitude, you aren't getting it," Neville said, bitter that he now owed Harry a life-debt.

"I don't need your gratitude," Harry said, "I just want to talk with you."

"About what?"

"Don't you find it a bit odd that both our parents chose traitorous secret-keepers?" Harry began, "Especially your parents, who were well respected Aurors?"

"What is your point?"

"My point is that the Fidelius charm is a very powerful spell. So powerful that even Veritaserum or the Imperious curse couldn't force the secret-keeper to reveal the secret. It can only be done willingly. I've been told in the past that my parents changed secret-keepers as a bluff, but why would they need to if there was no way, other than torture, to force a secret-keeper to give up their secret? I know that Sirius would've died before he betrayed my parents and they knew that too. So clearly, something else persuaded them to change. Such as a certain headmaster for instance?"

"You're lying!" Neville said, desperately, "Dumbledore would never do that!"

"Are you sure?" Harry said, "Think about it. If you change your mind, you know where I am." He turned and walked out of the hospital wing, leaving behind a thoroughly confused Neville.

In Harry's room, there was a letter from Gringotts

Dear Mr. Potter,

Preparations are nearly complete for the lawsuit against Ginevra Molly Weasley. You were right in your belief that Albus Dumbledore is too politically powerful to be prosecuted at this time, though we will stay alert for an opportunity.

Griphook

After the last exam, Snape 'accidentally-on-purpose' revealed that Lupin was a werewolf. Remus decided to resign, knowing that the parents of the students would not tolerate him continuing to remain at the post as he was a 'danger' to the students. Indeed, Dumbledore had been bombarded by howlers demanding to know

why he was employing a werewolf, so it is likely that he would've been forced to resign anyway. Ironically enough, it was the students who wanted him to stay.

"You're the best Defence teacher we've ever had," Ernie McMillan said.

"And you don't know how painful it is to not be able to teach anymore," Lupin said, "To tell you the truth, I've grown quite fond of it."

"Wait a minute," Harry said, "Just because you're no longer a teacher doesn't mean that you can't teach."

"What are you talking about?" Remus said.

"Well, I mean that Sirius and I have between us, enough resources to set you up as a private Defence tutor for any student who wants a little practice over the summer."

"That would be a good idea, but what about the parents?"

"What about the parents?" Harry said, "We could make it seem like Sirius was teaching the class. Heck, he could even fill in for you during the full moon and when the parents come by. It's perfect."

"Yes," Remus said with a thoughtful expression, "We could convert one of your houses into a school, which one would depend on how a big a turnout we get and we can also get an office in Diagon Alley."

"I'll bug my parents," Ernie said and the other students all nodded.

On platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , Harry gave Hermione a hug goodbye along with a kiss. They were taking things slow and had only shared a few kisses.

"Sirius is going to get tickets for the Quidditch World Cup," he said, "I'll owl you when we get the 'school' set up."

"I can hardly wait." Hermione said.

Harry went home to many taunts from Sirius and Tonks. Remus had told them about the snog after the Quidditch match.

Two weeks later...

"Ginevra Molly Weasley, you have heard the charges, what is your plea," Albus Dumbledore said in the Wizengamot court room.

"Guilty." Ginny said and there were murmurs in the audience.

"So noted," Dumbledore said, hitting the gavel on the table, "Ginevra Molly Weasley, your sentence for attempted use of a love potion is lifetime probation and all future suitors must be tested for controlling potions or spells. Your sentence for attempted line theft is that the Head of your family must disown you or revoke his family's pure-blood status."

Mr. Weasley stood and said: "I hereby disown Ginevra Molly Weasley."

"Very well," Dumbledore said. He smacked the gavel again "This court is adjourned."

"Why do I get the feeling that that was all just for show?" Harry asked.

"Because it probably was," Hermione said, "Dumbledore's throwing you a bone, hoping to appease you."

"Well, he's dead wrong." Harry said.

"What are you going to do about it?" Sirius asked.

"I think it's time I put my money and fame to good use."

"Ahh... Harry Potter," said Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, "What can I do for you today?" Harry lightly probed Fudge's mind and was glad to see that his hunch was correct.

"Actually, I've come to make a generous donation."

"I see," Fudge said, "And why would you want to do that?"

"Let me put it this way, how would you like to get rid of Dumbledore?"

"And why would I want to get rid of Dumbledore?" Fudge asked suspiciously.

"You can be frank with me, Minister," Harry said, "I know that you secretly resent Dumbledore and want to discredit him. The one thing you lack is the one thing I have, status."

"And what is in it for you?" Fudge asked.

"I wasn't kidding when I accused Dumbledore of attempted Line theft," Harry said.

"I see," Fudge said, "There is, however, a problem, and that problem is the public. Even the Boy-Who-Lived couldn't bring down Dumbledore overnight...no, no...we need to turn the public against him first and strip him of his titles, then bring him before the Wizengamot."

Harry was silent. This was exactly what he was hoping for. He just had to make sure that Dumbledore didn't catch on.

"Well, give me your donation," Fudge said, "And I'll do everything I can to turn the public against Dumbledore." Harry nodded and tossed the Minister several bulging sacks of money.

Please review, with thanks to my betas



As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter Fourteen

Harry's summer school idea had received such an enthusiastic reception, especially among the muggle-born students, that Harry had no choice but to use Potter Manor, the largest of the available houses. He would've used Grimmauld Place but for the fact that its appearance alone would drive away the parents. Remus was happy because it meant that he was finally going to be able to have a job he could keep and a steady source of income. Granted, he had to put glamours on and use an alias whenever the parents were around, but that was a small price to pay. Sirius was happy because it gave him something to do. The parents were happy because it gave them a chance to see what their children had learned.

The students were happy because they could practice without fear of the Ministry, Potter Manor had charms that prevented magic from being detected inside the house, and Harry was happy because it gave him an excuse to spend more time with Hermione and vice versa. Tonks had graduated from the Auror Academy and dropped by to teach whenever she had the opportunity.

Most of the students were in Harry's class, though a good deal of the older students also attended, probably to help prepare for their O.W.L.'s and N.E.W.T.'s as well as a fair number of younger students. In fact, Harry had quickly found himself drafted as a teaching assistant, something he came to enjoy. Maybe, when I'm done being an Auror, once Voldemort is dealt with, I can take a crack at the DADA curse. He thought one day.

The lessons included dark creatures, dueling, learning new spells, Potions, and, for the older students, wordless and wandless magic. Occlumency, Legilimency, and Animagus training were available by special request.

The school was officially called the 'Black Teaching Institute' however among the students it was known as 'The Institute'.

One day, Amelia Bones, after dropping off Susan, approached Harry.

"I must say Mr. Potter, that I am impressed by this school," she said. "My niece says wonderful things about you. If even half of it is true, you would make a fine Auror one day."

Harry didn't know what to say so he simply said: "Thank you, I do my best."

"That's about all we can ever do," Amelia Bones said, "When you graduate, send me an owl so I can arrange an interview."

Harry's eyes went wide. He had only just finished his third year and already the Head of Magical Law Enforcement had guaranteed him an interview for his intended career path! Wow, she must really be impressed.

"Thank you." Harry said, not knowing what else to say.

"Just keep it up, Mr. Potter." she said and left the house.

"You don't know how lucky you are," Susan said from behind him, "My aunt never does that, especially for someone so young, unless she's absolutely certain that they'll make it through the training."

"Well, tell her that I'm really grateful for her faith in me and that I promise I won't disappoint her."

Late in July, Professor McGonagall showed up at Potter Manor and asked to speak with Harry in private.

"What is it Professor?"

"First, I'd like to commend you for this school. Have you considered a career in teaching, by chance?"

"Actually, I've been thinking about becoming a teacher after I retire from the Auror force once Voldemort is dealt with."

McGonagall nodded at this. "You certainly have the grades to become one, even Severus has admitted, in private of course, that you are one of his best students."

"Must have hurt him a lot to say that."

"You have no idea," she said with just the faintest hint of a smile, "Anyway, my main reason for coming by here was to discuss your muggle relatives."

"What about them?" Harry asked suspiciously, "Has Dumbledore asked you to convince me to stay there?"

"Not at all. Apparently," she said "They have an 11 year-old daughter by the name of Flora who possesses a great deal of talent. Unfortunately, she hasn't been getting her letters. I'm not surprised, given who they are, and I'm about to go over there and...talk with them, but I would like you to come along. Experience has taught me that muggle-borns better adjust to the idea of magic if they know a relative who also possesses the talent." Harry sighed,

"Very well." he said. For all he knew, it was a trick by Dumbledore.

Dumbledore had other things on his mind. He was in his office talking to the former Ginny Weasley. Beforehand, he had cast a spell on her.

"You have done well so far. If it wasn't for those two learning Occlumency, then the plan would have continued. That is why you are still here. I will be paying your way through Hogwarts for this year. Help me succeed and I will get you through Hogwarts with brand new clothes, new books and a new broom, which is what you've always wanted. Do well and you will be given the Seeker position on the Quidditch team next year, you will become Prefect and if you do really well, you will become Head Girl, get to marry Harry and the important thing is, when he dies killing Voldemort, you will get his money, which will then be transferred to my vault."

"But we have that Mudblood to worry about." Ginny said.

"Don't worry about that. We will split them up in due course." Dumbledore said.

Privet Drive was a very bland place. All the houses were practically identical and very small when compared to his and Sirius's houses. McGonagall led Harry to number four and knocked on the door. A large, fat man with no neck answered the door

"Yes, how can I help you?"

"My name is Minerva McGonagall," McGonagall said, "and this is Harry Potter, we are here to speak with your daughter." The man turned an interesting shade of puce.

"Wait a minute, you're from that...that...freak place!" he shouted. A tall and thin woman with a long neck came running down the stairs.

"Vernon, be quiet, the neighbours will hear."

"I'm not about to let them take away our daughter to that...place!"

"And how do you think you're going to stop her...Uncle."

"The law..." Vernon began.

McGonagall stepped in. "The law states that a witch or wizard has to attend Hogwarts or face time in prison." This wasn't true but Dursley wasn't going to know it.

"I am not paying for this..." Vernon stamped his foot.

"You don't have to," Harry said, "because I will. I'll handle everything about her schooling, so as far as you could be concerned, she's just going off to some boarding school. I can even make it so that she doesn't have to come back for the summer."

Vernon reluctantly stepped aside and let them in. He agreed to everything that Harry had said, which only confirmed his and McGonagall's feelings about them. They found Flora in the smallest bedroom, which was painted pink. She looked like a weird combination of Petunia and Lily. She had Lily's eyes and hair, but everything else belonged to Petunia.

"Flora Dursley?"

"Yes, who are you?" she demanded.

"I am your cousin, Harry Potter."

"I don't have a cousin." Flora said.

"That's what your parents would like you to believe," Harry said, "But believe me, I'm quite real."

"Why are you here?" she asked.

"I am here because you, like me, are magical."

"Magic doesn't exist," Flora said, with the firmness of someone who was sure they had all the answers. Harry only smiled.

"Have you ever made something happen? Something you couldn't explain? Something that, perhaps, made your parents and brother really upset?"

Flora's expression indicated that she had. She remembered the times where her brother Dudley had beaten her up and somehow, he ended up battered and bruised.

"You're a witch," Harry said. McGonagall pulled out a letter and gave it to Flora. She read it and her school lists and then looked up.

"How am I supposed to get this stuff?"

"I'll take care of it," Harry said, and beckoned with his hand, "Come on." Flora got up and followed Harry and McGonagall down the stairs.

"I am holding you to your promise," Vernon said, "I don't want to have to deal with anything and," he turned to Flora, "absolutely no mention of this at all to anyone!" After they had left, McGonagall grabbed each of their arms.

"Hold on and don't panic." she said.

"What's going on?" Flora said moments before McGonagall apparated them to just outside the Leaky Cauldron.

"Whoa," Flora said, "That was weird."

"It's called apparition," McGonagall said, "You will learn it when you are seventeen. Now, Mr. Potter, can I trust you to take care of the rest?"

"Yes, Professor. I'll see you at Hogwarts." McGonagall nodded and apparated away. Harry led Flora into the Leaky Cauldron.

"What'll it be today, Harry?" Tom asked.

"No time, Tom," Harry said, "I'm just helping my cousin get her school stuff."

"I didn't know you had a cousin, Harry." Tom said.

"Up until half an hour ago, neither did I."

"Hello, I'm Tom," the bartender introduced himself.

"Flora Dursley." she replied. As they made their way through the building, Flora asked Harry

"Why is everyone staring at me?"

"Actually, it's me they're staring at." Harry replied.

"Why?"

"I'll explain later." he said and they entered Diagon Alley. Flora's eyes went wide when she saw the shops. Harry carefully steered her towards Gringotts and met up with the Grangers.

"Harry!" Hermione said, giving him a bone-crushing hug.

"Okay, I need to breath now," Harry joked. Hermione let him go, blushing furiously.

"Who is this, Harry."

"Hermione, this my cousin, Flora Dursley. Flora, this is my best friend, Hermione Granger."

"Nice to meet you," Hermione said, shaking her hand, "First year?" Flora nodded.

"Well, okay," Hermione said, "I'll see you later, Harry."

"Likewise." Harry said. They had another quick hug and Harry led Flora inside the bank.

"Who are these...people?" Flora asked.

"They're goblins," Harry explained, "They run Gringotts." It did not take long for Harry to find Griphook.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Potter."

"Good afternoon, Griphook. I've just found out that my cousin, Flora, is a witch. So could you kindly set up a trust fund for her?"

"Of course," Griphook said. Several minutes later, he handed Flora a vault key.

"There you go, everything is set. Follow me please." Griphook led them to first Harry's trust fund and then Flora's.

Harry explained the values of each of the coins and then said: "It would be a good idea not to tell your parents and brother about this money. They would be down here faster than that to claim not only your vault, but all of mine because they will say that they are entitled to it because you are related to me through blood."

"Okay." Flora said. After she had filled up a money bag, Harry began taking her around the shops. Finally, they came to Ollivanders.

"Go inside and get your wand," Harry said, "I'll be right back."

"Where are you going?"

"I have to do something," he said, "It won't take long."

Flora nodded and walked into Ollivanders.

"Well, Miss Dursley, I've been wondering when you would drop by."

"You have?" she said, surprised. How could this man know her?

"Of course, news travels fast, especially when it involves Harry Potter." Mr. Ollivander said. Flora made a yet another mental note to ask Harry again about why everyone seemed to know him.

"Now, on to business," Ollivander said and got a box with a wand in it.

"Cherry and Unicorn hair, 9 inches, give it a wave." Flora waved it and when nothing happened, Ollivander snatched the wand and gave her another.

"Oak and Dragon heartstring, 12 inches," Flora waved it and again nothing happened.

"Tricky customer," Ollivander said, "The wand chooses the witch...Hickory and Unicorn hair, 8 inches." Flora flicked the wand and sparks came out of the end.

"Five Galleons." Mr. Ollivander said. Flora paid him and went outside to see Harry with a beautiful barn owl in a cage.

"I know it's a little late, but Happy Birthday."

"Thank you." Flora said.

They went to Fortescues where Harry bought some ice cream. Flora again asked Harry about his apparent fame and his brilliant green eyes were tinged with sadness.

"It is a long story," he said, "The very short version is like this, my parents were murdered by an evil wizard named Voldemort when I was just a baby. He then tried to curse but when he did, something happened. I don't exactly know why, but for some reason the curse backfired. It left me this scar."

Harry pulled up his hair to show her the lightning shaped scar.

"And what about Voldemort?"

"His body was destroyed, but he lingered on, a formless spirit."

"How?"

"As I said, I don't know, anyway Voldemort, you see, was trying to take over Britain. Everyone was terrified of him and even today, most people are too scared to even speak his name."



"And so when the curse backfired..."

"I became an instant celebrity at the age of one," Harry said. "Can you imagine that, becoming famous because your parents died." Flora's face showed the appropriate amount of sorrow.

"What happened to Voldemort?"

"He's still alive," Harry said, "in a manner of speaking. I've had several encounters with him since and barely survived each."

"Why does he want to kill you so much?" Flora said "What did you ever do to him, aside from destroying his body?"

"That is another story for another time." Harry said. Hermione walked up to him and gave Harry a hug and kiss.

"Did you get your cousin squared away?"

"Yep," Harry said, "I was just telling her my life story."

"How far did you get?" she asked.

"I told her everything except about my adventures and the you-know-what" Harry said and Hermione nodded. Harry turned back to Flora, "I have something else to tell you " he said "A number of the students at Hogwarts aren't going to like you because you are muggle-born."

"Huh?" Flora said.

"Muggles are non-magic people," Harry said, "And some people think that Hogwarts should only admit students who have magical parents."

"That's absurd." Flora said.

"We certainly think so," Hermione said, "But some people don't and they're going to torment you because of it."

"Thanks for the warning," Flora said, rolling her eyes. They were probably exaggerating.

I must learn as much as I can about the Wizarding world. My father and mother simply don't understand. I, however, will make them understand.

It was sure nice to have a cousin rich enough to buy Grunnings with his spare change. Flora was sure that her parents would think very differently of Harry if they knew about his money.

Now if only I could get my hands on more than just this bloody trust fund...

Please review, with thanks to those who have and thanks to my betas  
Top of Form

Bottom of Form

## Chapter Fifteen

"Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday, dear Harry, Happy Birthday to you!" Harry smiled at the assembled guest, which included his cousin, who had wanted to stay at Harry's house until school started.

Harry couldn't exactly refuse, she was family after all. Flora had even sat in on some of Harry's lessons, trying to get a head start. He began opening his presents. Hermione gave him a broomstick care kit for his Firebolt, Sirius gave him a wand care kit, Remus gave him a new wand holster, and Tonks gave him a book on stealth spells, ironic because she had gotten poor marks in the Stealth and Tracking part of her Auror training.

Harry slashed at Hermione with his practice blade. Hermione parried and cut sideways. Harry dodged and blocked before counter-attacking. After a particularly swift riposte from Hermione that gave Harry a new bruise, Sirius called an end to the practice

"You're both getting much better, but you're not paying enough attention to each other...or you are but it's the wrong kind of attention..."

"Sirius!" Harry and Hermione said in unison, "How many times do I have to tell you that we're just friends," said Harry.

"Yes, just friends," agreed Hermione, forgetting about their big kiss after the Quidditch final.

"Right," Sirius said with a wink, "You know, Potter males have a tendency to fall for bookworms..." He trailed off at the murderous looks they were both shooting him and laughed. "You two really need to lighten up."

"There'll be plenty of time to 'lighten up' after Voldemort is dead," Harry said.

"Just promise you'll relax at the Quidditch World Cup?" Sirius asked and they nodded.

Harry began practicing his new spells. He couldn't yet fully Disillusion himself, but he was getting better. Hermione, on the other hand, had the Disillusionment spell almost completely down.

"Okay, Harry," Hermione said, getting a pair of feathers, "Let's try out non-verbal magic." Hermione flicked her wand and thought Wingardium Leviosa. The feather spun for a few seconds, but that was about it. Harry flicked his wand and thought Wingardium Leviosa. Nothing happened.

"Don't worry, Harry," Hermione said, "You'll get it down soon, let's continue practicing."

But Harry was getting distracted by thoughts of a certain bushy-haired girl.

"I don't think we've been introduced," Colin Creevey said, "I'm Colin Creevey."

"Flora Dursley" Flora said "I'm about to start my first year, Harry is my cousin."

"He is?" Colin said with wide eyes.

"Yes," Flora said with just a touch of arrogance, "Well, I think he is."

"Wow," Colin said, oblivious to her tone, "Must be cool."

"Not really," Flora said, "He spends all his time either teaching or off with that Granger girl."

"It's much the same at school," Colin said and leaned in closer for a conspiratorial whisper, "Personally, I think they're secretly going out, but aren't ready to publicly admit it yet."

"Wouldn't surprise me in the least." Flora said and winked at him.

"Ladies and Gentlemen...welcome! Welcome to the final of the four hundred and twenty-second Quidditch World Cup!" Ludo Bagman's voice boomed throughout the stadium. "And now, without further ado, allow me to introduce the Bulgarian National Team Mascots." The Bulgarian supporters roared their approval as the Veela glided onto the field and began dancing. Many of the males seemed ready

to jump from of their boxes. Harry, however, merely raised his eyebrow and wondered what was so fascinating about such a vulgar dance.

"Why haven't you been affected?" Hermione wondered.

"I don't know," Harry said not realising that his attraction for the girl next to him was enough to repeal their charm.

The Veela departed the field, to the disappointment of much of the crowd.

"And now," roared Bagman, "The Irish National Mascots!"

A great green and gold comet came zooming into the stadium, did a circuit, and then split into two smaller comets, which headed towards the goalposts. A rainbow suddenly arced across the field, connecting the two. The rainbow faded and the two balls of light reunited and formed a giant shamrock that rose up into the sky. Golden coins began falling from the shamrock and Harry squinted to see that it was actually made up of thousands of Leprechauns. All around them, people were trying to gather up the coins. Harry, Hermione, Remus, and Sirius did not. Flora, on the other hand, was stuffing her pockets. The Leprechauns drifted down onto the field, across from the Veela, to watch the match.

"And now," Bagman shouted, "I give you...Dimitrov, Ivanova, Zagraf, Levski, Vulchanov, Volkov, and Krum!" The Bulgarian players soared onto the field.

"And now, I give you Connolly, Ryan, Troy, Mullet, Moran, Quigley and Lynch."

The Irish players swept onto the field. Harry saw through his Omnioculars that the Irish all had Firebolts and smiled. He vaguely heard Bagman introduce the referee, who released the balls.

Mostafa blasted his whistle and the game began. The Irish Chasers were superb, working as a seamless team. Within ten minutes, Ireland was up, thirty to zero. The Bulgarian Beaters began whacking the Bludgers as hard as they could and started to throw the Irish off their game. The Bulgarians finally scored and then Harry watched in amazement as the Bulgarian Seeker, Viktor Krum, pulled

off the Wronski Feint, injuring the Irish Seeker, Lynch. Lynch recovered several minutes later.

Fifteen minutes after that, Ireland was ahead, 130-10, and the game was starting to get dirty. The Bulgarian Keeper committed a foul, earning a penalty shot for Ireland. It quickly became two shots when the veela tried to influence the referee. Ireland made both of the shots and the game resumed. Moments later, there was another penalty and another made shot. Harry glanced down to see the Veela and the Leprechauns engaged in a furious battle. Lynch saw the Snitch and dove after it, Krum in hot pursuit. Lynch crashed again and Krum caught the Snitch, ending the game. The final score was Bulgaria 160, Ireland 170.

"Well, who'd have thought that," Harry said, "Krum got the Snitch, but Ireland won."

Bagman, from his commentary, clearly thought the same thing.

Back at their tent, Harry, Sirius and Remus were celebrating over Butterbeer. Hermione was curled up with a book and Flora was off in the corner. There was a commotion outside and they went to investigate. Cloaked figures in masks were running around, setting fire to the tents.

"Death Eaters!" Sirius said and four wands were instantly out.

"What's going on?" Flora said.

"Go find the twins," Harry said, "Stay with them."

Harry, Hermione, Sirius and Remus began firing spells at the Death Eaters.

"Stupefy!" Harry yelled and his target quickly dodged the stunner...into Sirius's Impediment Jinx. Hermione and Remus were also working together in a similar fashion.

Aeled was flying overhead, singing his song. One of the Death Eaters said "Avada Kedavra!"

Harry tried to get out of the way, but he wasn't fast enough. Aeled, however, was, and quickly flew down and swallowed the jet of green

light. There was a burst of flame and Aeled fell to the ground, small, wrinkled, and flightless.

Harry heard a voice say "Morsmorde!"

Harry instantly turned and yelled "Stupefy!" in the general direction of the voice and smirked in satisfaction when he heard a 'thump' as someone fell to the ground. He looked and saw that the Death Eaters, minus their three immobilized comrades, had fled. The whole camp was now nothing more than smoldering piles of ash. Harry looked up and his heart chilled when he saw the Dark Mark hovering over them. There were a series of popping noises as the Aurors arrived.

"Well, it's about time," Harry said, noticing that he hadn't been the only person who had stood and fought and smiled when he saw that they mostly consisted of Institute students.

The Aurors removed their masks of the captured Death Eaters

"Walden MacNair...Crabbe Sr.... Goyle Sr and Barty Crouch Jr?" one of the Aurors said, "I thought he was dead."

"Apparently not," the elder Crouch said "Take him away."

He then looked at the house-elf who had been next to Crouch Jr and tossed her his hat. The house-elf immediately broke out into tears.

"No....No.... Winky is a good house-elf. Master can't be firing Winky..."

"It is done," Mr. Crouch said, "Be gone you worthless elf." Winky vanished with a 'pop' and Hermione looked a little disturbed at what she had just witnessed. An Auror picked up the wand that Crouch Jr. had used and Flora spoke up.

"That's mine, sir," she said, "I accidentally dropped it." Harry gave his cousin a chastising look and made a mental note to get her a proper holster for Christmas.

That night, Harry forgot to reinforce his shields and had a nightmare about Voldemort.

He was in a darkened room, sitting in a chair. A figure appeared out of the shadows

"Master?" the figure said.

"Crucio!" Voldemort snarled and the figure fell to the ground, writhing in pain. "You thought you could get away with deserting me." Voldemort said, "I hope you have learned your lesson."

"Yes, Master." the figure said in a dead tone.

"You have a chance to redeem yourself, do not fail me."

"What must I do, Master?"

"You must..."

Harry jolted awake, his scar hurting for the first time in three years.

Damnit, why did I have to wake up now, Harry thought, Why couldn't it have been five minutes later?

Harry had learned not to take his dreams lightly.

The Daily Prophet had a field day about the incident at the World Cup. The front page carried a picture of the Dark Mark. The reporter, Rita Skeeter, spared no venom in attacking the Ministry for its incompetence and lambasted how a group of inexperienced students could possibly be better than the Ministry Aurors. She also attacked Mr. Crouch regarding the actions of his son.

Mr. Crouch's immediate sacking of his house-elf Winky raises suspicions about just which side he is on. This reporter hopes that it was just a case of not being able to control the elf, but even so...

Flora came storming down the stairs.

"The gold, where is it?" she demanded.

"What, the Leprechaun gold?" Harry asked, "It only exists for thirty-six hours."

Flora furiously stomped back upstairs.



"What was up with her?" Harry asked.

"I don't know," Hermione said, "But we should definitely keep a closer eye on her. Personally, I don't think she is all that she seems."

"Agreed," Harry said and paused for a moment, "You know, Hermione, I've been doing some research and I've found it a bit...odd that only muggle-born and muggle-raised students have gotten notices for underage magic."

"Yes, that is odd," Hermione said, "The only explanation I can come up with is that the Ministry can only track spells, not their casters. This, of course, would mean that pure-blood and, to an extent, half-blood students would be able to practice magic without fear of reprisal."

"We really need to get that law changed," Harry said, "I can understand the need to keep the existence of magic a secret, but that is already covered by the Statute of Secrecy, the Underage restriction is just another way to prosecute muggle-borns."

Harry was in the middle of a duel with Hermione and Ernie when the door opened. The three combatants put their wand down to see a scarred man with a fake eye and an artificial leg which clanked with each step it took. He had a long staff and a long black cloak.

"Hello, Mr. Potter, Mr. McMillian, Miss Granger. My name is Alastor Moody, Professor Dumbledore has made me the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher."

"I see," Harry said. He had heard all about Moody's exploits as an Auror during the war. Half the cells in Azkaban were full because of him. Moody, however, was also known for being quite paranoid.

"I heard about your little school here and decided to come see if it was actually worth anything. I must say that I had set my expectations low, but I was impressed by that little duel of yours. Your spells are okay for students of your age, but your stances are crap and full of holes." Moody limped forward, "I also suggest that you read up on the Dark Arts to know what you are up against."

"We're way ahead of you, sir," Harry said, "The library at Grimmauld Place is...quite extensive."

Moody gave a thin smile.

"Alright then, pop quiz. True or False, the Dark Arts are the only spells with dark uses."

"False," Harry said, "The Banishing and Severing Charms are just as effective at harming or killing someone, as are a number of common household spells."

"And," Hermione added, "A powerful enough Summoning or Banishing Charm is also quite deadly."

"Very good," Moody said, "This summer school of yours has just saved me a great deal of time and effort. Now I have fewer people to bring up to speed."

"Just out of curiosity, sir," Hermione asked, "What are we going to be learning?"

"I, like you and Professor Lupin, believe in a practical approach. If Professor Dumbledore gives me permission, and I think he will, I'm going to start with the Unforgivables and then go from there."

"Sounds like fun," Harry said, "As long as you don't Avada Kedava me as a demonstration."

The students of Hogwarts were assembled in the Great Hall for the Sorting. The Sorting Hat opened its mouth and began singing:

A thousand years or more ago,

When I was newly sewn,

There lived four wizards of renown,

Whose names are still well known:

Bold Gryffindor, from wild moor,

Fair Ravenclaw, from glen,

Sweet Hufflepuff, from valley broad,  
Shrewd Slytherin, from fen.  
They shared a wish, a hope, a dream,  
They hatched a daring plan  
To educate young socerers  
Thus Hogwarts School began.  
Now each of these four founders  
Formed their own House, for each  
Did value different virtues  
In the ones they had to teach.  
By Gryffindor, the bravest were  
Prized far beyond the rest;  
For Ravenclaw, the cleverest  
Would always be the best  
For Hufflepuff, hard workers were  
Most worthy of admission  
And power-hungry Slytherin  
Loved those of great ambition.  
While still alive, they did divide  
Their favorites from the throng.  
Yet how to pick the worthy ones

When they were dead and gone?

'Twas Gryffindor who found the way,

He whipped me off his head

The founders put some brains in me

So I could choose instead!

Now slip me snug about your ears,

I've never yet been wrong,

I'll have a look inside your mind

And tell where you belong!

The Great Hall rang with applause when the Sorting Hat finished. Professor McGonagall unrolled a scroll of parchment and began reading:

"Ackerley, Stewart!" "RAVENCLAW"

"Baddock, Malcolm!" "SLYTHERIN!"

"Branstone, Eleanor!" "HUFFLEPUFF!"

"Cauldwell, Owen!" "HUFFLEPUFF!"

"Creevey, Dennis!" "GRYFFINDOR!" (Colin had warned Harry about his brother's arrival which fascinated him because he had no idea two wizards could be born in the same generation to Muggle parents – he made a mental note to check up on his parents at some point.)

"Dobbs, Emma!" "GRYFFINDOR!"

"Dursley, Flora!"

Flora went to the stool, sat down and the hat was placed on her.

Ah, Miss. Dursley – I wondered if we would see any of Harry Potter's relatives here. But I doubt we ever will besides his children because

you are not Flora Dursley. You altered the Dursley's memories and took on the appearance of a Dursley girl. You've done well to use that temporary memory potion and new variation of Polyjuice. You're lucky that student/sorting is protected by privilege otherwise I would have to announce this to the entire school and you don't want that, especially with your plans. But I have to sort you in the meantime, so SLYTHERIN!"

There were gasps all through the Great Hall at the notion of a muggle-born being Sorted into Slytherin. The one who was most shocked was Harry. I should've known...

The Sorting continued. Natalie McDonald became a Gryffindor

"Pritchard, Graham!" "SLYTHERIN!"

"Quirke, Orla!" "RAVENCLAW!"

"Whitby, Kevin!" "HUFFLEPUFF!"

McGonagall picked up the hat and the stool and carted them away. Professor Dumbledore stood and addressed the students.

"I have only two words to say to you, Tuck in!"

Ron Weasley was heard to exclaim "ABOUT TIME!" The plates filled with food and they began eating. Harry heard Nearly Headless Nick say something about Peeves scaring the house-elves and Hermione put her fork down.

"There are house-elves here?" she said in horror, "At Hogwarts?"

"Certainly," said the ghost, surprised at her reaction, "Over a hundred, I believe."

"But they get paid?" Hermione asked, "They got holidays?, don't they?" Nick laughed so much that his head flopped off and he had to set it right again.

"Sick leave and pensions?" he said, "House-elves don't want sick leave and pensions."

Hermione pushed her food away, refusing to eat another bite. Harry leaned over and whispered into her ear.

"Sirius and I have house-elves too," he said, "And you eat our food and don't beat us up about it."

"You at least pay them, Harry," Hermione said, "These elves aren't paid."

"Well, starving yourself isn't going to get them wages," Harry said, "Nor, do I think they would accept them in any case." Harry looked around for a moment and then said, "Sirius and I had to practically threaten ours with clothing to get them to accept wages and even then they wouldn't take any more than one Galleon a month and one day off a month. I'll talk to Sirius and see if he can send us any books on the topic, I'm sure they exist." Hermione gave a slight nod.

"Alright Harry" she said and forced herself to resume eating.

Please review, with thanks to my beta

Thanks to those who had ideas of Flora Dursley not being who she seems to be. But who could she be?

## Chapter 16

"It is my painful duty to inform you that the Inter-House Quidditch Cup will not take place this year." Dumbledore announced when everyone had finished eating.

"What?" Harry gasped. The twins and most of the other students were also in shock.

"This is due to an event that will be starting in October, and continuing throughout the school year, taking up much of the teachers' time and energy....but I am sure you will all enjoy it immensely. I have great pleasure in announcing that this year at Hogwarts..."

Dumbledore was cut off by a deafening rumble of thunder and the doors of the Great Hall banged open as Alastor Moody clanked in. He shook Dumbledore's hand and then took his place at the Staff table.

"May I introduce our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Moody." Only Dumbledore, Harry and Hermione clapped at this. Everyone else was transfixed by Moody's appearance.

"As I was saying," Dumbledore said, "We are to have the honour of hosting a very exciting event that has not been held for over a century. It is my very great pleasure to inform you that the Triwizard Tournament will be taking place at Hogwarts this year."

"You're JOKING!" said Fred and the tension in the Great Hall seemed to melt away.

"I am not," Dumbledore said, "For those of you who do not know, the Triwizard Tournament was first established some seven hundred years ago as a friendly competition between the three largest European schools of Wizardry, Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang. A champion was selected to represent each school and the three champions competed in three magical tasks. The schools took it in turns to host the tournament once every five years, and it was generally agreed to be a most excellent way of establishing ties between young witches and wizards of different nationalities...until, that is, the death toll mounted so that the tournament was discontinued."

"Death toll?" Hermione whispered, alarmed.

Harry quickly leaned over and whispered into her ear; "Don't worry, I have no intention of entering."

This seemed to calm her down a bit. Dumbledore continued after the Great Hall had settled down again.

"There have been several attempts over the centuries to reinstate the tournament, none of which has been very successfully. However, our own Departments of International Magic Cooperation and Magical Games and Sports have decided that the time is ripe for another attempt. We have worked hard over the summer to ensure that this time, no champion will find himself or herself in mortal danger." Dumbledore paused for a moment.

"The Heads of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving with their short listed contenders in October and the selection of the three champions. An impartial judge will decide which students are most worthy to compete for the Triwizard Cup, the glory of their school, and a thousand Galleons personal prize money." The students began talking excitedly.

"I'm going for it!" said Fred. Harry merely sat back. This was definitely going to be a normal year. No Quidditch simply meant more time to train. Time for someone else to put their life on the line...

"Eager, though I know all of you will be to bring the Triwizard Cup to Hogwarts," Dumbledore continued, "The Heads of the participating schools along with the Ministry of Magic, have agreed to impose an age restriction on contenders this year. Only students who are of age, that is seventeen years or older, will be allowed to put forward their names for consideration."

This caused a number of people to get in an uproar and Dumbledore held up his hands and raised his voice.

"This, is a measure we feel is necessary, given that the tournament tasks will still be difficult and dangerous, whatever precautions we take, and it is highly unlikely that students below sixth and seventh year will be able to cope with them. I will personally ensure that no



underage student hoodwinks our impartial judge into making them Hogwarts champion." Dumbledore's twinkling eyes briefly rested on Fred and George.

"I therefore, beg you not to waste your time submitting yourself if you are under seventeen. The delegations from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will be arriving in October and remaining with us for the greater part of this year. I know that you will all extend every courtesy to our foreign guests while they are with us, and will give your whole-hearted support to the Hogwarts champion, when he or she is selected."

With that, Dumbledore dismissed the students. Harry heard Fred, George, and Ron all whining loudly about not being able to participate as they filed out of the Great Hall. Harry merely shook his head as they plotted using an Aging potion to fool the judge. Neville got caught in a trick stair and a suit of armour began laughing. Harry and Hermione didn't even look back nor did any other student, not even Ron.

"Someone, help me!" Neville whimpered.

That night in the dormitory, Harry pulled out his mirror and told Sirius about Hermione's new obsession.

"Yes," Sirius said, "I think I know just the book for her. I'll send up."

"Okay," Harry said and then lay down on his bed. He dreamed that he was the Hogwarts champion and had just won the Triwizard Cup, earning a kiss from Hermione.

In Herbology, they had the unenviable task of collecting bubotuber pus. In Care of Magical Creatures, Grubbly-Plank introduced them to a unicorn.

In Arithmancy, they began learning how to predict future events and analyze someone's personality using Arithmantic formulas. Harry, just for kicks, did Dumbledore. Manipulative...obviously...willing to do whatever it takes...no surprise there...has otherwise good aims? Potentially, I mean the prophecy is the whole basis of his plans, though something tells me that he might not want me around afterwards, especially if I continue to be uncooperative. Oh well, he'll be gone soon enough anyway.

Harry and Hermione visited Hagrid and saw that he had an egg. It was not a dragon egg, that much was certain.

"What is it, exactly?" Harry asked.

"A Blast-Ended Skrewt egg, of course." Hagrid said.

"A what?" Hermione said and Harry gave her a surprised look. Something Hermione has never heard of before...wow. I must indeed be rare.

"What do Blast-Ended Skrewts do?" Harry asked, "What are they useful for?"

"Umm....I don't rightly know," Hagrid said, "But they're amazing, let me tell you."

"Uhhh...okay," Harry said, "Keep us informed."

They left Hagrid's hut and Hermione said; "I am so glad that Hagrid is not the Care of Magical Creatures teacher."

"Why is that?" Harry asked.

"Because then he'd probably have a whole bunch of those...things." Harry chuckled.

"Well, that's Hagrid for you." He then became serious, "I hope this doesn't turn out to be another Norbert, but knowing Hagrid..."

Albus Dumbledore sat back in his chair and pondered. Ginny was essentially disposable, despite his promises, as there were plenty of other easily controllable girls at Hogwarts. A tip-off in the right place at the right time would see her in Azkaban for use of illegal potions, and if Molly Weasley kicks up a stink about it, have her locked up for the large number of love potions she used on Arthur Weasley. Flora was a new variable in the equation and potentially very useful, although she did have that familiar feel too her. The fact that she was a Slytherin was a minor inconvenience, Harry was just too kind-hearted to immediately turn her away. This would allow me to find out a number of things...such as, which girls he likes. Once I know that, if the girl is controllable, which is likely, I can 'arrange' for them

to get together. This, in turn, should make Harry easier to control. The Triwizard Tournament would only help in this regard, due to the Yule Ball. A smile started to form on Dumbledore's face.

That night, Harry and Hermione went running around in the forest in their animagus forms. They had felt an urge to exercise and so had decided to do this. It wasn't as fun as with Moony and Padfoot, but still exhilarating. As they were walking back to the common room, Harry noticed a brilliant white ferret walking along the corridors. Odd he thought, wondering who would have the animagus form of a ferret. Only one name suggested itself.

"You're not fooling us, Malfoy," Harry said and the ferret ran off in the general direction of the Slytherin common room.

"Looks like we have a new nickname for Malfoy," Hermione said, rubbing her hands in glee.

People were milling outside the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom. Harry and Hermione pushed their way through the crowd.

"What's going on here?"

"The door's locked." Seamus said.

"Ever considered unlocking it?" Harry asked before raising his wand; "Alohomora!"

The door clicked open and Harry and Hermione tentatively led their classmates into the darkened classroom. "Lumos" Harry said and moments later a red bolt suddenly headed towards him. Harry ducked and yelled "Stupefy!" in the general direction of bolt.

A voice growled; "Protego."

Harry saw the shield deflect the stunner and the lights came on to reveal Professor Moody.

"Well done Potter, five points to Gryffindor for your outstanding reflexes and quick thinking."

Everyone took a seat and after Moody had taken the attendance, he said,

"How many of you were smart and attended the Institute over the summer?" More than half the class raised their hand.

"Good, good," Moody said and began pacing around the room, "For those of you who did, this is merely going to be review, but those of you who didn't are behind. Before I can teach you this year's curriculum, I have to undo two years of damage in just one month, so expect lots of homework. At the end of this month will be a test to see how much you've learned. I am also going to be organizing a dueling club for anyone who is interested. The first meeting will be this afternoon."

The rest of the class was taken up with the lecture about the Dark Arts that Quirrel should've given them.

Professor Moody led the members of the Dueling Club through the Hogwarts corridors. The great majority of them were, Harry noted, fourth years. There were, however, several third years, a number of older students, and two first years, one of them Flora, something that disturbed Harry to no end. Wonder if Dumbles has gotten to her yet? Harry thought, making a mental note to probe her mind when the opportunity presented itself.

Professor Moody arrived at the tapestry of Barnabas Barby and began pacing in front of the wall opposite. A door suddenly appeared and Moody led them into a large room. There were several bookcases, sofas and chairs, but the great majority of the room was open space.

"Welcome to the Room of Requirement," Moody said, his eye moving swiftly over them, "This is where we will be having our meetings."

"What is this room?" Flora asked.

"It is what you need it to be," Moody simply said, "You merely need to think about what you want..." a mug of butterbeer appeared in Moody's hand "And the Room provides."

Moody took a sip of the butterbeer. "Alright," he said, "May I assume that all of you know the basic dueling spells?"

Everyone except Flora and Dennis Creevey nodded.

"Very well then, you two step aside. The rest of you are to split up into groups of two and duel while I get Miss Dursley and Mr. Creevey up to speed."

People immediately started pairing off. Harry started to head over to Hermione and somehow ended up paired with Cedric Diggory.

"You beat me in Quidditch, Harry," Cedric said, "So, I guess I want to know how I'd fare in a duel."

Harry started to open his mouth in protest, after all Cedric was a seventh year, which meant that he knew N.E.W.T level spells. Harry stopped when he remembered Power is not everything. Harry took a deep breath.

"Alright," he said. Harry and Cedric stood with their backs to each other. They walked twenty paces, turned and bowed. On the count of three, Harry raised his wand and fired a stunner at Cedric, who blocked it.

"Impedimenta" Cedric said and Harry ducked and began firing spells at random.

"Stupefy, Glacius, Petrificus Totalus, Furnurculus...." Cedric, however, merely conjured a silver shield that deflected the spells and began firing hexes of his own, many of them non-verbal. Harry, however, was using Legilimency to read Cedric's mind and see what spells he was about to use and as a result the duel dragged on without an apparent end.

Harry finally shouted; "Serpentsortia!"

A large black snake erupted out of Harry's wand and started slithering towards Cedric. 'Attack him but do not hurt him' Harry hissed in Parseltongue. The snake provided only a momentary distraction as Cedric quickly killed it with a Severing charm, but that moment of distraction was all Harry had needed. Cedric went down in the Full-Body Bind. It was then that Harry noticed that people were staring at him.

"What?" he asked, impatiently.

"What...what did you do?" Flora asked.

"I'm a Parselmouth," Harry explained, "I can speak to snakes," He shrugged and Moody muttered under his breath.

"You could do a lot more than that..." He then applauded Harry. "One of the key rules of combat, when you can't win by brute force, create a distraction." Harry reversed the spell on Cedric and the Hufflepuff stood up.

"Good job, Harry," Cedric said, "If this had been a real duel, I'd be dead. You have just made me very glad that I'm not your enemy." After the class had gotten back to their duel, Cedric asked Harry in a low voice.

"Just how did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"I'm not an idiot, Harry," Cedric said, "I was using non-verbal spells, even your reflexes aren't that good."

"Quite true," Harry said, "But I had another advantage."

"Which is...." Harry looked around before lowering his voice even further.

"I am a Legilimens."

Cedric sighed; "I should've known." he said, "Tell me again why the Ministry doesn't allow Hogwarts to teach Legilimency and Occlumency?"

"Because they're a bunch of paranoid politicians." Harry replied Though, if I ever become the DADA teacher, that's going to change, Ministry or not...

"Well that was fun," Harry said to Hermione as they walked to the Gryffindor common room.

"Maybe for you," Hermione said, "But I had to duel Ginny. Her Bat-Bogey hex is incredible."

"And I can believe it, especially given how angry she must still be about being disowned and all."

"Yes," Hermione said, "Imagine being kicked out of the house at her age. I wonder where she spent the summer...or for that matter, how she afforded her school supplies?"

"I don't know," Harry said, "And at the moment, I really don't care. I still haven't forgiven her for using the love potion on me. But if you were to ask me, then I think Dumbledore had something to do with it." The fact that she had been a willing participant only made it worse. Neither of them saw Flora, who quickly began walking towards the Headmasters office.

Albus Dumbledore use a Memory Charm to make Flora forget the conversation that they had just had and dismissed her. He then contemplated what he had learned. Granger is too strong to control...I should've known Potter would go for her. It wasn't a problem yet, but it might be in the future. Curse their training in Occlumency! An idea came to him but he discarded it just as quickly Soul bonding rituals have to be agreed to by both parties...wait a minute! He remembered something he had read a while ago, about rituals that pure-blood families often used to maintain the purity of their line But Potter is a half-blood...no matter, I will simply modify the rituals accordingly. It will take at least three months, but it should work. If everything went according to plan, Potter would be under control by New Years. Then he would find out who Flora really was – her memories of her birth and early days seemed to have been wiped.

Hermione Granger yawned, got dressed, and walked downstairs. Today was her fifteenth birthday, but so far, only her parents and Harry seemed to know that fact. She entered the common room and did a double-take, rubbing her eyes to make sure she wasn't still dreaming. Over the portrait door was a banner with words that flashed in different colours.

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY HERMIONE!**

Harry was standing below the banner with a small package in his hands and a mischievous grin on his face.

"Happy Birthday," he said and handed her the package. Hermione tore it open to reveal an old, battered book titled The True History of the House-Elves,

"Oh, Harry!" Hermione said, "This is magnificent, thank you!" She hugged him warmly and then asked; "Did you do that banner yourself?"

"I had a little help from Fred and George, but the basic idea was mine." Though their help wasn't exactly free...

"Well, thank you again," Hermione said, "You don't know how much this means to me."

"You're my friend, I wanted to show how much I cared about you. Now," Harry said, holding out his arm and grinning even wider, "Why don't we go down to breakfast."

"Alright, pay up!" Fred said to Seamus and Dean, who began fishing Galleons out of their pockets. A number of other Gryffindors also began tossing coins onto the table which were quickly swept up by George. The two of them had bet that Harry and Hermione would come into the Great Hall arm in arm and their winnings today more than made up for the money that Ludo Bagman had cheated them out of at the Quidditch World Cup, though they still lacked enough money to start their joke shop. The fact that Harry was a fellow conspirator certainly didn't hurt things either, though Fred and George had absolutely refused to take any of Harry's money, despite repeated offers on his part.

Hermione saw the Galleons being exchanged and merely shook her head. I don't know what they're going on about; Harry is just my friend...

Harry was profoundly grateful when Hermione didn't seem to mind the Galleons. After all, we are just friends...

During breakfast, Ron amused everyone when he briefly became a canary. Harry muttered a spell, chuckled at the results and removed a cream puff and a toffee from his plate.

"Nice try, Forge and Gred," he said, "But you should know by now, thanks to your former sister, that I've become almost as paranoid as



Moody." The twins became serious and nodded. No one in their family would ever forget what Ginny had done. And to think that we were actually planning on selling love potions at our joke shop...Fred thought.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

Here's the latest chapter for everyone to enjoy. Some interesting choices about who Flora Dursley really is. I won't reveal who it is yet, but I will say it is NOT Ginny Weasley. It will be the least likely person. But will Mad Eye be a fake in this story too? I've not decided. As Jedipilot never made the final chapters public, it leaves me free to make my own choices on this.

## Chapter 17

Hermione was curled up on a couch in the Gryffindor common room reading *The True History of the House-elves*. Crookshanks was purring contentedly next to Harry, who was doing his *History of Magic* homework. Hermione remained the only person who could stay awake during Professor Binn's lectures, though Harry would be forever clueless as to how. Hermione suddenly jolted up.

"That's it, I've got it!"

"The Hospital Wing is that way." Harry pointed and Hermione looked at him strangely for a minute before realizing the joke and laughing.

"No," she said, "I mean I figured out why the house-elves seem to enjoy their imprisonment."

"Well please don't keep me in suspense," Harry said.

"It basically goes like this," Hermione began, "The house-elves used to be wizardkind's key ally against the goblins. They fought on our side in many wars, all of them successful...for us anyway."

Harry nodded, remembering how effortlessly Dobby had beaten Malfoy Sr.

"What happened?"

"The goblins got smart and co-opted the house-elves before the rebellion of 1783. The wizards won and, as part of the peace treaty, the house-elves became the wizards domestic slaves."

"Oh," Harry said, somberly, "I see. The house-elves at my house did say that wages were disgraceful, but I never imagined..."

"Well, it was better than the alternative," Hermione said.

"And what was that?"

"Extermination," Hermione bitterly replied, "That, apparently, was favored by a man named Fredrick Umbridge."

"Does anyone know what the three darkest curses are called?" Moody asked in the first DADA class of October. A surprising number of students raised their hands.

"Miss Granger," Moody said.

"They are called the Unforgivables," Hermione said, "Because the use of any one on a human being is enough to earn a life sentence in Azkaban."

"Correct," Moody growled, "Mr. Weasley, name one curse."

"Well, umm...." Ron said "My father told me about the Imperious curse..."

"Yes," Moody said, "Your father would know about that one. After Voldemort was defeated, lots of witches and wizards came in claiming to have been under the Imperious curse. It was a devil of a time sorting out the liars...and some people fell through the cracks." Moody did not look at Malfoy, but he did not have to. "Allow me to demonstrate," Moody said as he pulled a spider out of a jar and pointed his wand at it. "Imperio." Moody growled and the spider began doing flips and somersaults, eliciting laughter from everyone except Harry.

"Yes," Moody said, "You would think it was funny if I put it on you, wouldn't you?" The laughter died. "Total control!" Moody continued, "I could make the spider drown herself or throw herself out the window. It takes a strong mind to fight the Imperious curse and training in Occlumency doesn't hurt either. Longbottom, name another curse."

"The...the Cruciatus curse," Longbottom said and Moody nodded.

"Yes, the Torture curse. Causes massive amounts of pain and leaves no mark." Moody pointed his wand at the spider again. "Crucio!" The spider began twitching violently. Hermione could not bear it any longer and shouted.

"Stop it!" Malfoy sniggered but Moody merely glanced at her before raising his wand, lifting the curse.

"Potter, what is the third curse?" Moody asked.

"The Killing Curse," Harry said, "It is unblockable, leaves no mark aside from the victims vacant expression, and I'm the only person known to have survived it."

"Yes, twice in fact if memory serves," Moody pointed his wand at the spider again, "Avada Kedavra!"

The spider died in a flash of green light. "If your name is not Harry Potter, then you only have two options against the Killing Curse, dodging it and summoning objects in it's path, both of which we will be covering. The former starting two classes from now, the latter after you learn the Summoning Charm."

The bell rang. "Next class, I will be putting you under the Imperious curse to see how you fare." The students silently filled out. While they made their way to dinner, Malfoy laughed.

"Granger can't stand the Cruciatus curse, I can't see how you could be interested in such a weak mudblood, Potter..." Harry clenched his fists. In his anger, he had nearly transformed into his panther form and that simply would not do. Having such a powerful animal as his form had conferred upon him a number of advantages, the least of which were heightened senses and reflexes. Combined with his already superb Seeker reflexes and senses, not to mention his daily exercise, and Malfoy never even saw the fists coming. The pale-haired Slytherin fell to the ground, bleeding heavily from his nose.

"Be glad that that's all I broke." Harry said in a tone that could freeze helium. Hermione had never seen Harry this angry before and Harry himself didn't understand why he had reacted this way. He whirled and stomped to the Great Hall, Hermione not far behind.

"You really shouldn't have done that," she said.

"I know, but he just made me angry." Harry said.

Just as they were making their way back to the Gryffindor Tower, Harry and Hermione were waylaid by Dumbledore, McGonagall, and Snape.

"What did you do to Mr. Malfoy?" Dumbledore asked and Harry calmly relayed what Malfoy had said, word for word. McGonagall was immediately upset, Snape merely sneered. Dumbledore, however, was unreadable.

"Harry, my boy," Dumbledore said in his best grandfather tone, "I must commend you for your restraint..."

"Restraint!" Snape snarled, "He attacked a student..."

"And only did superficial, easily healed, injuries!" McGonagall said, "But he could've easily done far worse." Dumbledore nodded and continued.

"Which is why you are only going to get one night of detention, though I must ask that you try harder to keep control of your temper."

Harry glared at Dumbledore for a moment. Something was up, something big. He could feel it. What's your game headmaster? We both know you're not fooling anyone with that ridiculous act.

After the next Dueling Club meeting, Moody had Harry stay behind.

"Is something the matter, Professor?"

"No," Moody said, "I just wanted to ask you what you know about Parselmagic?"

"Parselmagic?"

"You really don't think that Parselmouth's can just talk to snakes," Moody growled, "That would be a pretty limited gift, otherwise."

"I'm listening," Harry said.

"Most Parselmagic spells are classified as 'dark' simply out of fear, though there are some truly dark parselmagic spells. I, of course, couldn't tell you what they were, but if I were Salazar Slytherin, the Chamber of Secret's sounds like a perfect place to hide Parselmagic spellbooks."

"I agree," Harry said, "I'll be sure to take a good look around the next time I'm down there."

Moody nodded "And while you're down there, you should keep in mind that basilisk skin is almost as magically reflective as dragonhide and takes a long time to start decaying." Harry smirked.

"Thank you for telling me that."

Harry's detention fortuitously happened to be with Mr. Filch and involved mopping the floor in and around Myrtle's bathroom. She, apparently, had decided to flood her toilet again. Harry had to scrub the floor three times before Filch pronounced it clean. He slinked away and cautiously re-entered the bathroom. Hermione came in several minutes later and wordlessly nodded. Harry found the tap and hissed.

"Open."

The sink moved away, revealing the chute. Harry frowned for a moment and then hissed "Could there be some stairs?"

Out of the sides of the chute came a steep flight of stairs. Harry and Hermione pulled out their wands and headed down into the Chamber. Harry hissed "Open" at the second entrance and they were instantly overcome by the smell of dead basilisk.

"Well, it's been dead for over a year," Hermione said in a bossy tone, "There was bound to be a stench."

"I know, but still..." Harry shook his head and they began searching for a secret door of some kind. As they did, Hermione said:

"I've been thinking, Harry. We're in the middle of our growth spurts, so any suit we make now will be too small by the end of the year."

Granted, we have a lot of skin to work with, but...wait a minute that's it."

"What?" Harry said.

"I already know the spells for extracting the skin and forming a suit out of it...if we spliced them together along with a modified Protean charm..."

"We could make the suits self-adjust for our height," Harry finished, "Hermione you are a genius."

Hermione blushed slightly and continued: "It will take months of Arithmetic calculations," she said, "And the Protean charm is a N.E.W.T. level spell, so it will take some time to learn."

"But if it works, it'll be well worth the effort," Harry said, "And with no Quidditch practice, we have a lot more time on our hands anyway." And it's not like I would enter this stupid Tournament even if I could.

They did not find a secret door in the Chamber of Secrets and made their way out and back up to Myrtle's bathroom. The Chamber sealed itself again and they left the bathroom and quietly went back to the Gryffindor tower. It was well past their curfew, but they fortunately did not encounter anyone.

In their next DADA class, Moody carried through on his threat and started putting students under the Imperious curse. Dean hopped around the classroom singing the school song, Lavender imitated a cow, Neville did some gymnastics that he would normally have been incapable of doing. Hermione was the first person to show any resistance at all, but she quickly crumbled and was soon impersonating a chipmunk.

"Potter, you're next," Moody growled and Harry stepped forward. "Imperio!" Harry felt a floating sensation and was suddenly at calm and peaceful. He heard Moody's voice.

"Jump on the desk...Jump on the desk..." It was, however, a very small and unimportant voice and Harry ignored it.

"Jump on the desk...Jump on the desk!"

"No," Harry said, "It's dumb!"

"JUMP ON THE DESK...JUMP ON THE DESK!"

"NO!" Harry said and blinked, completely throwing off the curse. Moody looked genuinely impressed.

"Well done Potter, well done. Five points to Gryffindor. They won't be able to control you!"

Harry and Hermione took a break from their Arithmantic calculations to do another fruitless search of the Chamber of Secrets. Harry had the feeling that what they were looking for was just under their nose, but he had absolutely no clue where.

As Halloween neared, the castle was spiffed up many times over. The teachers also began piling on the homework.

"You are entering one the most important phases of your magical education," Professor McGonagall said in Transfiguration one day "Your Ordinary Wizarding Levels are drawing nearer..."

"But we don't have O.W.L.'s until next year!" Dean Thomas said indignantly.

"Maybe," McGonagall said, "But you need all the preparation you can have. Mr. Potter and Miss Granger remain the only students here who can turn a hedgehog into a satisfactory pincushion, and could probably pass their O.W.L's today if they took the exam. May I remind you that your pincushion, Mr. Thomas, still curls up in fright if anyone approaches it with a pin." The day before the students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang arrived, Neville accidentally transplanted his ears onto a cactus in Transfiguration.

McGonagall said to him: "Kindly don't tell anyone from Durmstrang that you cannot even perform a simple Switching Spell."

The students from Beauxbatons arrived in a flying carriage and Hagrid took the horses away when Grubbly-Plank proved to be not up to the job. The students from Durmstrang arrived in a ship that sailed underneath the sea. Everyone went to the Great Hall. The students from Durmstrang sat with the Slytherins to some people's consternation. Ron, for his part, couldn't stop gaping at Viktor Krum.



Just then, a girl from Beauxbatons walked by and Ron's attention shifted to her, as did most of the other male students. Harry, who had seen that kind of reaction before at the Quidditch World Cup, thought I wonder if she's Veela or part-Veela perhaps? After the Feast, Dumbledore introduced Ludo Bagman and Barty Crouch Sr and then unveiled the Goblet. They then announced the age limit.

"I will be personally drawing an Age line around the Goblet," Dumbledore said, "It will prevent anyone under the age of seventeen from entering their name." Dumbledore then dismissed the students.

Harry and Hermione went back to their common room, Fred, George, and Ron began plotting how to deceive the Goblet with an ageing potion. Neville forgot one of the trick stairs and got caught.

"Someone help me." he whimpered. Harry paused for a moment and turned to give him a questioning look that Neville instantly recognized. Neville's face became murderous.

"You are a liar!" he snarled, drawing some more questioning looks from the other students, wondering what the silent conversation was about. Harry sighed and continued on to the Gryffindor common room.

Dean and Seamus helped Neville out of the stair and then Dean said; "Would you mind telling us just what that was about?"

"It doesn't concern you," Neville quickly said, "It was just some rubbish that Harry told me last year."

Dean and Seamus exchanged looks and shrugged.

Harry and Hermione were doing their History of Magic homework when Dean and Seamus approached them.

"Yes?" Harry asked.

"What exactly was that between you and Neville?" Seamus asked, "He said it wasn't important but his reaction was a whole another story."

"Neville is having a moment of disillusionment," Harry said, "He knows something is true, but he doesn't want to believe it. I'm not at

liberty to tell you what exactly it is because it is a personal matter that he must deal with on his own."

"I see," Dean said, "Well good night to both of you."

"Yeah," Seamus said and the two of them went upstairs. Harry and Hermione went to their dormitories when they finished their homework.

The following day, the Great Hall was packed again as the minutes before the Goblet made its decision ticked away. The moment of truth finally came and the fire in the Goblet turned red and spat out a piece of parchment that Dumbledore quickly caught.

"The Champion for Durmstrang is Viktor Krum." The Durmstrang students erupted into cheers. The fire in the Goblet became red again and spat out another piece of parchment.

"The Champion for Beauxbatons is Fleur Delacour." The girl Harry had earmarked as being potentially part-Veela, jumped up and went to stand next to Viktor Krum. The fire in the Goblet changed yet again and spat out a third piece of paper.

"The Champion for Hogwarts is Cedric Diggory." Now the Hufflepuff's erupted into cheers. Harry sat back. He had been hoping for the champion to be a Gryffindor, but at least it wasn't a Slytherin. As the three Champions were led into a side room, Dumbledore began speaking.

"We now have our three champions. I must encourage you all to support your champions to the maximum. By doing so, you will contribute in a very real..." Dumbledore trailed off as the fire in the Goblet changed again and spat out a fourth piece of parchment.

Dumbledore caught it and read: "Harry Potter?"

"No!" Harry said. This couldn't be happening. How is this possible? A few students were shooting him admiring looks. The great majority, however, were looking at him with undisguised anger.

"Harry Potter!" Dumbledore said in a louder voice, "Harry, get up here now."

"No!" Harry said, "I did not put my name in the Goblet, therefore I do not have to participate."

"The Goblet of Fire is a binding magical contract sealed on your name, not your signature," Mr. Crouch said smoothly and Harry jumped up in shock.

"But that...that means that anyone could be entered against their will and be forced to compete."

"Theoretically, yes," Crouch said, "But we have never had that problem before..."

"Harry, get up here," Dumbledore repeated and Harry locked eyes with the headmaster for a moment. Had he done this? No, of course not. Dumbledore wants me alive so I can kill Voldemort. He wouldn't do something like this...or would he on the assumption that I would become easier to control? Merlin! I really am turning into Moody.

"Just go, Harry," Hermione said, "Everything will be okay." Harry sighed and slumped forward, cursing under his breath in Parseltongue. He was quickly hustled into the room with the other three champions along with Moody, Dumbledore, McGonagall, Crouch and Bagman.

"What is going on?" Fleur asked.

"Ladies and Gentleman," Bagman said, "Incredible as it may seem, let me introduce the fourth champion, Harry Potter."

"What?" Madam Maxine demanded, "This must be some kind of joke."

"Believe me I wish it was," Harry said, "If it were up to me, I'd still be back in the Great Hall." Harry noticed that Karkaroff didn't look that surprised, though he was trying very hard to. He sent a light probe and was instantly rebuffed by Karkaroff's shields. The Director of Durmstrang gave Harry a fearful look and took a few steps back. I wonder what he's hiding? Harry thought But why would he do it? It just did not make any sense.

"Someone," Harry continued, "must really be wanting to kill me, though I can't say who since there are quite a few people on that list, most of whom could do something like this." Moody merely nodded.

"The Goblet of Fire is a powerful magical artifact. Only an exceptionally powerful Confundus Charm could've hoodwinked it, well beyond the magic of any student."

"You seem to have given this quite a bit of thought." Karkaroff said in what he hoped was an even tone.

"Because that was my job," Moody said as his eye whirled around, "As you well ought to know."

"Silence!" Dumbledore commanded and turned to Harry, "Did you put your name in the Goblet?"

"No."

"Did you have an older student or adult do it for you?"

"No."

"He is obviously lying," Karkaroff said and Dumbledore silenced him again.

"Professor Moody is right," Dumbledore said, "Harry could not have fooled the age line, nor could he have fooled the Goblet, therefore he was indeed entered against his will. However, he must still participate if he does not wish to die a painful death."

Harry shot Dumbledore a curious glance. If the prophecy as Harry had heard it was true, then he could only be killed by Voldemort, not some stupid goblet. Then again, it's quite possible that Voldemort was the one who fooled the Goblet. Unlikely I'll admit, but possible. Harry made a mental note to take a trip to the Department of Mysteries and hear the prophecy for himself. For now, he would operate on the assumption that Dumbledore had been telling the truth regarding the prophecy.

"All well and good," Harry said, his gaze never leaving Dumbledore, "Except for the tiny fact that I could die in this bloody Tournament. Didn't you yourself say that only sixth and seventh years had a

chance?" Dumbledore squirmed at this. Harry certainly had a point, prophecy or not. Finally, he said

"You will just have to do your best." You'd better not die, or I'll kill you myself!

Please review, with thanks to my betas

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me

## Chapter Eighteen

"How did you fool the Goblet?" Cedric asked Harry as they left the Great Hall.

"I didn't," Harry said, "You have to believe me."

"To be honest," Cedric said, "I'm not sure what to believe." Harry sighed and nodded. That at least was better than outright disbelief. He and Cedric parted ways and Harry entered the Gryffindor common room to a thunder of questions, all of them essentially the same.

"How did you do it, Harry?" Fred asked.

"Yes, please tell us." George said.

"I didn't fool the bloody Goblet!" Harry shouted, "I did not enter the Tournament! I have enough fame for ten people! And the prize money? You all know that a thousand Galleons is bloody pocket change to me!" Harry saw that the Gryffindors, with the exception of Ron, Neville, and Ginny, were all looking at him intently. "You have to believe me," He continued, "I didn't want this to happen."

"I believe you, Harry," Hermione said, stepping forward. Hermione, however, was the only one who did.

The Gryffindors, with the exception of Ron, Ginny, and Neville, all considered Harry to be 'a better champion than Cedric anyway'. The next day, Harry learned that Hermione was the only student in the entire school who believed him. The Hufflepuff's and Slytherins's he could understand, but the Ravenclaws also didn't believe Harry. The students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang thought he was a cheater trying to give Hogwarts two chances at a win. Flora was the only other person who even pretended to listen to him, but Harry distanced himself from her just to be safe. The Daily Prophet used this as another opportunity to bash Dumbledore. Rita Skeeter wrote:

Albus Dumbledore must really be losing his grip if he cannot even prevent a fourth-year from fooling the Goblet of Fire.

Harry sighed upon reading the article. At least some good was going to come out of this fiasco, though he was of the opinion that it would take another year or two before Dumbledore's popularity was eroded enough to remove him.

Albus Dumbledore was not happy at all. As if I didn't have enough to do already, now I have to keep Potter from dying in the Tournament. Since he was one of the judges, he couldn't actually do anything, however it was hardly his fault if a teacher happened to casually let slip something that would give Potter an edge.

"You're what?" Sirius exclaimed over the mirror.

"I'm a Triwizard champion," Harry said, "But it wasn't my fault. Someone Confunded the Goblet and entered me against my will. Who, however I cannot say."

"Well, not many wizards and witches have the power to Confund an object as powerful as the Goblet of Fire."

"Would Igor Karkaroff be among the number who can?" Harry asked.

"Possibly," Sirius said, scratching his beard, "But why do you suspect Karkaroff? After all, wouldn't he want his own champion to win?"

"Under normal circumstances, I would say yes," Harry said, "But Karkaroff didn't seem very surprised to learn that I was a champion and he's also a skilled Occlumens."

"Even so," Sirius said, "What would entering you into the Tournament get him?"

"Maybe he's hoping that I'll die." Harry said.

"But to what end?" Hermione asked, "Voldemort doesn't take kindly to traitors, whatever they might do to redeem themselves."

Maybe not, Harry thought, But that was not the situation in my dream after the Quidditch World Cup. Harry, however, could not very well go around accusing Karkaroff of anything like this on the basis of one, incomplete dream.

Harry did not really care that he was being shunned by the entire student body. I don't need them. He did, however, need Hermione and was glad beyond words that she believed him. The two of them were currently practicing nonverbal magic in the Room of Requirement. Harry flicked and swished his wand feather and thought Wingardium Leviosa! The quill did absolutely nothing. Six tries later, it still hadn't moved. Hermione had managed to make the quill move a few centimeters, but that was about it.

"Try thinking about the action as well as the words." Hermione said. Harry nodded and imagined the quill floating up as he did the wand movement and thought the incantation. The quill twitched for a moment and then lay still. Harry, feeling very drained, said: "Maybe I'm going about this the wrong way."

"I'm sure we'll improve with practice," Hermione said, "It could be that this is part of the reason why they don't normally teach nonverbal spells until 6th and 7th years."

"Perhaps," Harry said, "But I still have the feeling that I'm missing a big piece of the puzzle." Like he was in a number of other things as well.

He was in fact so distracted by all the things that were going on that in Charms, he could not for the life of him cast a Summoning Charm. He did so badly that he got extra homework from Flitwick and even when Hermione practiced with him in private, the Summoning Charm continued to elude Harry. Harry got some sense of relief when he Hagrid told him that he believed him too. Hagrid also told them how his Blast-Ended Skrewt egg had hatched some weeks ago and showed them the four ugly, misshapen things in their cages.

"I wish I coulda told ye earlier," Hagrid said, "But I bin too busy you know?"

"Yes, we do know," Harry said, again very glad that Hagrid wasn't the Care of Magical Creatures teacher.

Harry and Hermione arrived at Snape's dungeon for Potions. They found the Slytherin's waiting for them, and all were sporting badges that said

Support Cedric Diggory



## A Real Hogwarts Champion

"Like the badges, Potter?" Malfoy said loudly, "And that's not all they do, look." Malfoy touched his badge and the letter's rearranged themselves to say:

Potter Stinks!

The Slytherin's all broke out into laughter and activated their badges as well. Harry's only reaction was to raise an eyebrow.

"Really Malfoy," he said, "Is that the best you can come up with?" Harry suddenly chuckled The Sorting Hat was right, I should've been in Slytherin. I'm more Slytherin than the Slytherin's.

"What's so funny?" Malfoy asked.

"Oh nothing." Harry casually said as he used a bit of wandless magic to alter Malfoy's badge so that it now read

I should've been in Hufflepuff!

Hermione and the other Gryffindors laughed at seeing the new and improved badge.

"What's..." Malfoy noticed that the other Slytherins were also laughing and pointing. He looked down at his badge and became even paler than he already was, if that was possible. He tried to take it off, but Harry had already applied a permanent Sticking Charm and so he ended up tearing his robes. Malfoy and Harry glared at each other for a moment and then whipped their wands out.

"Furnunculus!" Harry yelled.

"Densaugeo!" screamed Malfoy at the same moment.

Their spells collided in mid-air and bounced off each other. Harry's hit Goyle in the face, causing large boils to appear there. Malfoy's hit Hermione's, causing her front teeth to start growing rapidly. In the midst of all this commotion, Snape came around the corner.

"Fighting in the hallways, I see," he said, "Fifty points from Gryffindor." Snape examined Goyle's face and said "Go to the hospital wing."

"What about Hermione?" Harry asked and Snape coldly regarded her.

"I see no difference." Snape said and Hermione ran to the Hospital wing in tears. Harry felt his anger flare and followed her.

"Skipping class?" Snape sneered, "Detention."

Harry didn't care about the points or the detention. Points were meaningless this year because of the Tournament and he would've likely gotten detention from Snape for some other 'offense' in class anyway. He reached Hospital wing and saw that Hermione's teeth were shrunken again.

"Why aren't you in class?" she nervously asked.

"I'm skipping it." Harry said and Hermione was shocked.

"Harry..."

"Don't start," he said, "You're more important." Hermione looked at Harry, unsure of exactly what to say. Just then, a breathless Colin Creevey arrived

"Harry..." Colin said, "I've been sent to take you to the Wand-weighting ceremony for the Champions."

"Alright," Harry said and hugged Hermione, "I'll see you later."

The room Creevey led Harry to was a small classroom with the desks pushed against the wall and inside were the other champions, Ludo Bagman, a witch in magenta robes, and a paunchy man holding a big black camera. Cedric and Fleur were chatting amiably. Viktor Krum was being his usual moody self. Ludo Bagman and the witch came over to Harry.

"Ah...Harry, here you are. We were starting to think you had gotten lost, come, in come in. The wand-weighting ceremony will begin shortly. Have to make sure that your wands are in good condition,

they are, after all, your most important tools in the upcoming tasks." Bagman beamed and Harry snorted. Bagman clearly had no skill in wandless magic. Bagman then gestured to the witch beside him. She had rigid curls and a heavy-jawed face and wore jeweled spectacles. Her fingers clutched a dragon-skin handbag and her two inch nails were painted crimson.

"This is Rita Skeeter from the Daily Prophet." Bagman said, "She's doing a tiny article about the Tournament..."

"Maybe not that small..." Skeeter said to Bagman, though she never took her eyes off Harry, "I wonder if I could have a little word with Harry before we start..."

"Absolutely not," Harry cut her off.

The last thing he wanted or needed was more publicity. Dumbledore chose that moment to arrive with the other judges and Mr. Ollivander. The latter began examining the champions' wands. When he got to Fleur, Harry learned that she was indeed part-Veela. After the ceremony was concluded, it was time for the photographs. After five minutes, Harry's patience wore thin. The camera exploded, filling the room with smoke, plastic, film, and an unusual burning smell. He and the other champions quickly left the room.

"Thanks a bunch, Harry." Cedric said with a genuine smile. Fleur and Viktor also nodded their appreciation.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Harry, innocently, "That camera was obviously very poorly made and couldn't stand the strain of being around Rita Skeeter." Cedric and Fleur chuckled and even Viktor smiled for a moment.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

Thanks for all the kind words and encouragements. I also liked many of your suggestions who the real identity of Flora Dursley is. My personal favourite is from cornfertilizer who thought it was Delores Umbridge under Polyjuice, had a good laugh with that one. But it seems everyone's personal favourite is either Ginny or Bellatrix Lestrange. Ginny is not Flora but she may be an innocent party.

As a thank you for all the kind words of encouragement, I've merged Chapters 19 and 20 together. There are another eight chapters in this school year, before the final chapters. There is a poll regarding the development of the story on my profile, so please fill it in.

## Chapter 19

The next day, Harry saw Skeeter's article in the Daily Prophet. Her lack of an interview with Harry apparently had not prevented her from fabricating one wholesale. The article was supposed to be about the Tournament, though Cedric wasn't even mentioned and the other two Champions were only named once and incorrectly. Instead, the article focused on Harry's life, though it was nothing more than a pack of lies:

I suppose I get my strength from my parents. I know they'd be very proud of me if they could see me now...Yes, sometimes at night, I still cry about them, I'm not ashamed to admit it...I know nothing will hurt me during the tournament, because they're watching over me...

Rita Skeeter had gone one step even further and interviewed other people as well:

Harry has at last found love at Hogwarts. His close friend, Colin Creevey, says that Harry is almost never seen without the company of one Hermione Granger, a stunningly pretty Muggle-born girl who, like Harry, is one of the top students in the school.

The Slytherin's wasted no time in taunting Harry and Hermione, quoting passages in the hallway when they walked by and mocking them.

"Top students?" Malfoy asked, "What school is this? One with Creevy that you've founded together?"

"You're just bitter because you need Snape to alter your lousy marks for you." Hermione shouted to him.

"Stunningly pretty?" Pansy Parkinson snarled, "What were they comparing her to, a chipmunk?"

Harry and Hermione coped by simply ignoring it, though Harry made a mental note to see if Fudge could get Skeeter to print a retraction and full apology, or at the very least, get her sacked. I might have to make another 'donation' but it would be well worth it.

Harry still hadn't mastered the Summoning charm and was really starting to get frustrated. After yet another fruitless search of the Chamber of Secrets, Harry angrily yelled in parseltongue.

"Something open damnit!" To his great surprise, a portion of the wall slid away, revealing a room with a table, two chairs, and several bookcases, with books whose titles were all in parseltongue.

"I can't believe it," said Harry, exasperated, "All this time, it was right under our noses. I should've known it would something this simple."

"Of course it would be simple," said Hermione, "Most people tend to think of complex solutions to problems that they forget that simple ones are often better."

"But still...I feel so... stupid."

"Never mind that," Hermione snapped, "You have some more studying to do."

"Later," Harry said, "We have more important things at the moment. Like the Summoning Charm and preparing for the First Task. I highly doubt that the judges would approve of my using parselmagic."

"Still," Hermione insisted, "You should at least look at the books."

"Oh, all right," Harry said and scanned the titles idly, finally picking three curse books. They sat down at the table, and Harry began reading aloud, more for Hermione's sake.

"Let's see...first of all, a normal spell said in parseltongue is ten times more powerful."

"Yikes," said Hermione squeakily.

"But the power requirement also increases by the same amount," Harry continued.

"Oh," said Hermione, "Well, at least it has some limiting factor to it."

"Yeah," Harry said, "Now...oh my!"

"What?"

"Listen to this: The Soul-Eating Curse

This curse, if properly cast, will completely destroy a soul or soul fragment, unlike the Killing Curse which only separates a soul from its host body or object. This spell, however, also requires fifty times the power of the Killing Curse..."

"Oh my indeed!" Hermione interrupted and then frowned, "What exactly does it mean when it refers to 'soul fragments' and 'host objects'? That doesn't make sense."

"No it doesn't," Harry said and there was a long pause. "Guess this means more research, eh?"

Hermione nodded.

The Hogwarts library proved strangely scarce on books about soul magic. Grimmauld Place was different story entirely.

"Why do you want books about soul magic?" Sirius asked through the mirror.

"Research," Hermione said, "Harry came across a reference in a...book he was reading and so far we haven't found anything about it in the Hogwarts library. Not even the Restricted Section."

"Well...you see almost all soul magic involves sacrifices and rituals and..."

"Not that kind of soul magic," Harry said, "I'm talking about soul fragments inhabiting inanimate objects." Sirius blinked and his

mouth moved but no words came out of it. It took a while for him to regain the use of his voice and his eyes narrowed:

"Why in the...What are you....Harry, is there something I should know about?"

"That depends," said Harry, "It's more to satisfy curiosity than anything else..."

"This kind of curiosity could get you in serious trouble," Sirius said, "Or maybe even killed."

"Just humour us, please?" Hermione begged.

"No, absolutely not," Sirius said, "There are some things that should never see the light of day and this is one of them. Trust me; you don't want to get involved with horcruxes..." Sirius instantly clammed his mouth shut.

"Hor-what?" Hermione said.

"Nothing," said Sirius, "Forget I ever mentioned it! Promise me you won't." Harry and Hermione exchanged looks and then shrugged.

"Okay, Sirius," Harry said "We promise."

"Good," said Sirius, relief evident in his face. After talking for several more minutes, they turned off the mirror.

"Let's get back to the library," Hermione said.

There was, however, only one book in the whole library that even mentioned horcruxes and that was only in passing. It never said what they actually were, what they did or how they were created. However, Harry and Hermione already had a pretty good idea of at least what they were.

"The only question is," Harry said, "Why would anyone want to put part of their soul in an inanimate object?"

"I don't know," Hermione said, "And the library here doesn't seem to either. I'm certain that there are books about it at Grimmauld Place, but Sirius won't let us get books from there."

Neither of them noticed the beetle.

## Harry Potter: Tragic Hero or the next Dark Lord

By Rita Skeeter

This reporter has learned some rather disturbing things about Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived. Reliable sources, who wish to remain anonymous, have revealed that Harry Potter spends much of his time studying dark magic, especially parselmagic.

It is not a widely known fact that Harry Potter is a parseltongue because when this fact came out, Albus Dumbledore suppressed it.

"There were a lot of attacks on students a couple of years ago," reveals Draco Malfoy, a Hogwarts fourth-year, "Most people thought Potter was behind them after he lost his temper at a duelling club and set a snake on another boy. It was all hushed up of course. Potter would do anything for a bit of power and the fact that he's a teacher's pet allows him to get away with much more than any other student. Personally, I think Potter was behind the attacks, I just can't buy the official story that it was You-Know-Who because everyone knows that You-Know-Who was vanquished over 13 years ago."

A member of the Dark Force Defence League, who wishes to remain anonymous, is quoted saying that he would regard any parseltongue as 'worthy of investigation and observation' Parseltongue, as everyone knows, is the mark of a dark wizard. It is believed that You-Know-Who himself was a parseltongue.

This reporter questions the integrity of Albus Dumbledore and wonders how he can allow a potential dark wizard to run around unchecked in his school.

(Story continued on page 6)

(For rumours of Dumbledore's connections to goblin subversive groups, turn to page 9)

"Oh really," Harry rolled his eyes; "I suppose the Slytherins are a bunch of light wizards as well."



"That's not the problem, Harry," Hermione said, "The problem is how is Skeeter getting her information? Only you and I were...down there. Another thing, you weren't even at that Dueling Club meeting."

"I know," Harry said, "It doesn't make sense. Maybe she's using muggle recording devices?"

Now it was Hermione's turn to roll her eyes.

"Honestly, Harry," she said, "You can't use electric devices in Hogwarts. Anyone who's read Hogwarts, A History would know that."

"Just you then," Harry chuckled. "Maybe she was Disillusioned then? Or wearing an Invisibility cloak?"

"No, we would've..." Hermione looked around and then whispered into his ear, "We would've smelled them."

"Because of our...talents?" Harry whispered back and she nodded. "I wonder what else we could do..."

Harry and Hermione had written to the Daily Prophet to clarify that Harry had not been at the Dueling Club where he had supposed set a snake on Malfoy. The following article appeared in the next day's paper:

## POTTER ACCUSES MALFOY HEIR OF LYING

In an interview with our own Rita Skeeter, Hogwarts student and pureblood heir Draco Malfoy told of how Harry Potter set a snake on him during a Dueling Club.

Mr. Potter has written to us to say that he was not at the Dueling Club and that the snake, which was conjured by Mr. Malfoy attacked his Muggleborn friend Hermione Granger and that there were many witnesses to say that he was in the hospital wing at the time.

No-one has been willing to come forward to confirm Mr. Potter's side of the story. Lucius Malfoy has denounced Mr. Potter's claims as lies and is threatening to take legal action if Potter continues these claims.

Harry Potter had this to say: "I welcome Lucius Malfoy's threat of legal action, I will use my rights to force Pensive memories of the incidents to be admitted into evidence."

When the next Hogsmeade weekend came, Harry went to the village using his metamorph abilities to change his form, to avoid attention. Hermione was with him. After a near encounter with Skeeter and her photographer in which Harry took the opportunity to put a Tracking charm on Skeeter, they arrived at the Three Broomsticks. Harry sat down at the far table while Hermione got some butterbeer. As they were sipping it, Moody's magical eye scanned the crowd and then he walked over and said under his breath

"Nice abilities, Potter." Harry's eyes went wide.

"Your eye can see through a metamorph's abilities?" he whispered and Moody gave a slight nod

"That's how your cousin Tonks failed her stealth exam during Auror training," he said before taking a sip from his flask. He had told them in his last class how easy it was to poison unattended food. Harry, speaking from experience, could sympathize, though he wasn't about to take up the habit. I'm not that paranoid.

Moody gave a covert gesture and Hagrid bounded over and whispered to Harry.

"Come ter my house at 11:30 and bring that cloak of yers."

"Why?"

"Can't tell ye that, it's a surprise," Hagrid said before walking back to his table.

"Everything okay, Potter?" Moody asked.

"Just fine," Harry said "Why do you ask?"

"No reason," Moody replied. He gave Harry one last glance before also walking away.

"Any idea what the surprise is going to be?" Hermione asked and Harry sighed.

"Knowing Hagrid, it's going to be big and hairy."

The surprise was indeed big, though not hairy so much as scaly.

How the bloody hell am I supposed to fight dragons? Harry watched as Hagrid showed Madam Maxine the dragons and named their breeds. He also saw Karkaroff and realized that Cedric was now the only champion who didn't know about the dragons. He silently made his way back to the Gryffindor common room. Hermione was shocked as well and the next day, they immediately began researching various ways of fighting a dragon. Harry noticed that Viktor Krum was also in the library, shooting them curious looks every now and then. This was not the first time they had seen him. When they got up to leave, Viktor also got up and approached Harry.

"I need to speak with you...in private."

"Of course" Harry said and nodded for Hermione to go on. Viktor sent away his fan club and then turned back to Harry.

"What exactly is your relationship with Hermininy?"

"Her name's Hermione," Harry said "And to answer your question, we're just friends despite what you may read in the Daily Prophet." Harry was, frankly, a little surprised that Viktor was actually considering him to be a rival for Hermione. He was also, however, more than a little uncomfortable. In fact, he was finding it hard to maintain control of his temper: What's gotten into me? Hermione is my best friend. Her personal life is her own.

Viktor, however, did not seem to believe Harry and shot him a glance before leaving.

Harry sent a letter to Cedric warning him about the dragons. He also finally started making some progress with the Summoning Charm. A plan was starting to form in Harry's mind. He consulted with Sirius.

"Have you considered using a Conjunctivitis curse?" Sirius said.

"Yes," Harry replied, "But I have an even better idea." He turned to Hermione.

"How does the Bubble-Head charm go?"

"Bubble-Head charm?" Hermione asked confusedly, "Why in Merlin's name would you need to know that against a dragon?"

"Because I want to modify it," Harry said with a wicked grin that most certainly did not belong on the face of a 'Light Lord', "Here's what I want to do..."

Hermione listened to Harry's idea and her eyes narrowed and her mouth curled in a frown. What Harry was suggesting was...was...

"Do you realize how....how dark that is?" she asked.

"Yes," Harry sighed, "But the only other idea I have is to Summon my broom, and I'm not about to trust my Summoning Charm that far unless I absolutely have to."

"Aeled, help me," Hermione said and Aeled arrived in a burst of flame and settled on Harry's shoulder. The phoenix listened intently to what Hermione said.

"I must agree with Harry on this," Aeled trilled, 'Though the modifications are indeed dark, the spell itself does not matter as much as the person who uses it. I am not permitted to intervene in the tasks unless Harry's life is in critical danger. This plan, for all its darkness, is a lot safer for him than the other one, though you still need a way to draw the dragon away from the eggs.'

"Don't worry," Harry smiled, "I have a plan for that too."

Harry and Hermione stayed up until 2.a.m, practicing the Summoning Charm and making the modifications to the Bubble-Head Charm.

After lunch was the First Task. Hermione gave Harry a tight hug before he left with McGonagall to go to the Champions tent. The other three champions were already there along with Ludo Bagman, who told them the task.

"You must retrieve the golden egg from the dragon you are assigned. It will provide you with a clue

to the Second Task." Bagman then held up a velvet sack and offered it to Fleur. She put her hand in and withdrew a tiny model of a Hungarian Horntail with a number two around its neck. Krum pulled out a scarlet Welsh Green with a number three around its neck. Cedric pulled out a bluish-gray Chinese Fireball with a number one tied around its neck. Harry, knowing what was left, reached into the sack and pulled out the Swedish Short-Snout with a number four around its neck.

"Well, there you are," Bagman said, "You have each pulled the dragon you will be using. Now I must go because I'm commentating. Mr. Diggory, you're first. Just go out into the enclosure when you hear a whistle, all right. Now, Harry...could I have a word with you?"

"Uh...okay," Harry said blankly, wondering what Bagman would want to talk with him about. The two of them walked a short distance into the trees and then Bagman turned to regard Harry with a fatherly expression,

"Feeling all right, Harry?" he asked, "Anything I can get you?"

"What?" Harry said, startled, "No, I'm fine."

"Got a plan?" said Bagman, lowering his voice conspiratorially. "Because I don't mind sharing a few pointers..."

"I said I'm fine," Harry said, not caring that he sounded rude. What is Mr. Bagman up to? Harry wondered. Ludo Bagman shrugged and walked over to the other judges. Harry quickly went back to the Champions tent. The whistle blew and the task began. The commentary wasn't much to go by, but it was clear that the other champions were not doing so well, which of course did nothing to help Harry's nerves. Finally, it was his turn and he went out onto the pitch. The Swedish Short-snout was at the other end, crouched low over her eggs. Harry took a deep breath and raised his wand:

"Serpentsortia!" he yelled and a large python erupted from his wand,

"Engorgio!" Harry said and the python swelled to a respectable size. It wasn't as big as the dragon, but it was big enough for his purposes.

Harry then hissed in parseltongue "Draw the dragon away from the eggs." The snake slithered toward the dragon and then suddenly pulled back. It repeated the procedure several times more before the dragon began to approach it. The Short-Snout started to breathe fire, but Harry quickly stepped forward and shouted "Flammare Glacuis!" The fire hit him and the snake but did nothing aside from warming the air slightly. The Flame-Freezing charm had worked. The dragon snorted in surprise then charged and Harry quickly backed away. Just as it killed the snake with its claws, Harry cast his modified Bubble-Head charm on the dragon's face. It started to breath in and suddenly collapsed, wheezing and gasping for air. Harry calmly walked toward the nest and retrieved the golden egg.

Just as he picked it up, however, the modified Bubble-Head charm wore off and the dragon angrily got up and charged him.

"Oh, bloody hell" Harry said, rapidly dodging the dragon's claws and breath. Time for plan B. He raised his wand "Accio Firebolt!" It took a few minutes for the Firebolt to arrive, but when it did Harry jumped on. The Short-Snout, however, took flight and followed him. Harry flew directly up, the dragon hot on his tail. He then looped around and dove towards the pitch again. Harry waited until literally the very last second before pulling up. He came so close to the ground that it was a miracle that he managed to escape without serious injury. The dragon, however, was not so lucky. It collided with the ground and Charlie Weasley and his dragon-keepers quickly moved in to subdue it.

Harry landed in the first aid tent. As he dismounted, Madam Pomfrey rushed over to examine him, muttering;

"Dragons, what'll they bring to this school next?" His robes were a little burnt and there were some minor scrapes and bruises, but otherwise Harry was okay.

Hermione and Aeled arrived in a burst of flame. Aeled cried on the wounds while Hermione threw her arms around Harry. He could see the fingernail marks on her face where she'd been clutching it in fear.

"Harry, you were brilliant," she squeaked, "You really were."

"Indeed." Aeled trilled.

"Only because of you," Harry said, gazing into Hermione's chocolate brown eyes. Time seemed to stop for a moment, "That spell would've never worked without your help. I also never would've learned the Summoning Charm without your help." Hermione's arms slipped around his neck while Harry tenderly stroked her cheek.

"I was so worried about you," Hermione said as their brows touched. She took a deep breath and continued, "A lot more than I should've been."

"What?" Harry asked, slightly confused. Hermione, in answer, moved ever closer to Harry. They would've kissed if the moment hadn't been ruined by the flash of a camera. Harry and Hermione whirled to see Rita Skeeter and her photographer.

"Ahh...young love," Skeeter smirked as she readied her notebook and quill, "Harry, could I have a few words about..."

"You want a few words?" Harry glared at her, "Here's a few words 'get out!'"

"Yes," Viktor Krum agreed, "You are not welcome in here. This tent is for champions only – and friends." Skeeter frowned, but left nonetheless.

"Don't worry – I got what I wanted. Make the most of it Harry, this time tomorrow, who knows."

They looked outside to watch the judges calculate his score. Madam Maxine raised her wand in the air and a seven shot out of it. Mr. Crouch and Dumbledore both put out eights. Ludo Bagman put out a ten and Karkaroff a seven.

"How could Bagman give me a ten?" Harry asked. "I was injured."

"Don't complain." Hermione said, her arms never leaving Harry, "You're tied with Viktor Krum for first place."

Harry whispered to Hermione: "I was hoping for either lousy marks so I could be disqualified or a serious injury so I could forfeit." Hermione looked shocked at such a thought but calmed down.

The champions all gathered together. Cedric's face was covered in a thick, orange paste and he grinned at Harry.

"That was a pretty impressive piece of spellwork," he admitted. "Dark, but impressive."

"Indeed," Viktor said, "Your flying was also impressive." Harry grinned back and said:

"You guys weren't too bad either."

"Well done to all of you," Ludo Bagman said, "Now, just a few quick words. The second task will take place February 24th, so you have plenty of time to solve the clue inside the golden egg and prepare for the task. Well, off you go now."

As they walked back to the castle, Hermione took Harry by the arm and separated him from the crowd. She led him to a broom closet and sealed the door with her best locking and privacy charms. Hermione then snaked her arms around Harry's neck and pulled him close to her.

"Hermione...." But whatever Harry had been about to say was cut off as their lips crashed onto each other. Harry felt like he was on fire. The warmth of her touch...the passion of her embrace...the world could've ended right there and he wouldn't have noticed. He felt so complete, so...right. Things could never be the same again.

"I love you," he gasped out when they finally came up for air. There was no point in further denying it.

"I love you too, Harry," Hermione replied before she pulled him in for another kiss.

After an hour, Harry and Hermione finally make it to the Gryffindor common room, which erupted into cheers and yells when they arrived. The party was well underway. There were mountains of cake and flagons of pumpkin juice and butterbeer everywhere. Lee Jordan had set off some Filibuster Fireworks, so the air was thick



with stars and sparks. Dean Thomas had put up some banners that depicted the Short-Snout gasping for breath as Harry zoomed over it on his Firebolt. They helped themselves to food and were just starting to relax in a chair, when Lee Jordan said to Harry;

"Open up the egg, we want to see what's inside it." Hermione frowned slightly but said nothing. Harry pried the egg open to find it hollow and completely empty. The moment he did, however, the room was filled with a most horrible noise, a loud and screechy wailing. Harry quickly closed the egg.

Great, another mystery.

"What was that?" Seamus asked, "Sounded like a banshee to me. Maybe you have to fight one?"

"It was someone being tortured," Neville shuddered, looking unusually pale, forgetting that he wasn't talking to Harry. "Maybe they're going to put you under the Cruciatus curse."

"Don't be an idiot," Hermione said, relaxing in Harry's lap. It felt like the most natural thing in the world to her. Harry's body had 'reacted' to her presence, but Hermione did not mind at all. In fact, it almost made her want to giggle. The other girls were all giving her murderous looks but she studiously ignored them. "That's illegal," she continued, "They wouldn't do that to a champion."

"To me," George said, "It sounded like Percy singing. Maybe you've got to attack him in the shower."

Harry clutched his forehead as if in pain.

"Arggghh...I did not need that mental image!" (He'd rather see Hermione singing in the shower than anyone else although he wouldn't say no-thank-you to seeing Fleur Delacour and Daphne Greengrass singing in the shower, but he would love to see all three in there together)

Hermione cautiously took a jam tart from the tray Fred was offering her. Moments later Neville provided a welcome distraction when he turned into a large canary.

"Oh...sorry, Neville!" Fred shouted over the laughter. He didn't sound sorry "I forgot we hexed the custard creams." Neville mumbled and ran up the stairs, red with embarrassment.

"Canary Creams!" Fred said "George and I invented them...seven Sickles each, a bargain!" Fred then turned to Harry and Hermione, who were still in the chair.

"So," he said "It's official now between you?" They nodded "Excellent, you just won me 60 more Galleons!" He pivoted to go off and collect. This time, Hermione did giggle.

That night, Harry set the tiny model of his dragon on the table next to his bed. It yawned and then curled up and closed its eyes. Maybe dragons aren't so bad...Harry thought before drifting asleep. His dreams were of the bushy-haired variety and a smile formed on his face.

December began and with it came wind and sleet. Hagrid's Skrewts were growing very rapidly, already approaching six feet in length. They had thick, grey armour, powerful scuttling legs, fire-blasting ends, stingers, and suckers. What made it even worse, however, was that Rita Skeeter had taken an...interest in the Skrewts and had conned Hagrid into an interview. Harry, however, did not have much time to think about that because after a particularly hard Transfiguration lesson involving turning guinea fowl into guinea pigs, their homework was an essay about Cross-Species Switches,

McGonagall announced to the class;

"The Yule Ball is approaching. It is a traditional part of the Triwizard Tournament and an opportunity for us to socialize with our foreign guests. Now, the ball will only be open to fourth years and above, although you may invite younger students if you wish." Lavender and Parvati giggled "Dress robes will be worn" McGonagall continued "and the ball will start at eight o'clock on Christmas Day, finishing at midnight in the Great Hall. Now then" Professor McGonagall gave the class a piercing and clearly disapproving gaze "The Yule Ball is of course a chance to...let our hair down..." Lavender giggled even harder, trying to stifle the sound with her hand;

"But that does NOT mean" McGonagall said "that we will be relaxing the standards of behaviour for the students. I will be most displeased if a Gryffindor embarrasses the school in any way." The bell rang and the students packed their bags and shuffled off. Harry paused when McGonagall said

"Potter, a word, if you please?" Harry turned and regarded McGonagall

"Yes, Professor?" McGonagall waited until the rest of the class had gone and then said:

"Potter, the champions and their partners traditionally open the ball with a dance."

"I see," Harry said

"Do you have a partner in mind?" McGonagall asked and Harry nodded. Hermione was his girlfriend now, though he decided to ask her anyway just to be sure "In that case, you are dismissed" McGonagall said and Harry left the room to see Hermione waiting for him.

"What did McGonagall want?"

"Just to tell me that the Champions traditionally open the ball with a dance," he said "Which reminds me, will you go with me to the ball?"

"Of course!" Hermione said and gave him a chaste kiss "Why wouldn't I?"

"Just wanted to make sure," Harry simply said. They were nearly at the Great Hall when they suddenly surrounded by a pack of rabid girls who were all shouting

"Will you take me to the ball, Harry?"

"No, take me to the ball!"

"No, take me!" The girls all looked like they would kill him if he said no. Harry sighed, got out a Filibuster Firework and set it off. The girls all fell silent and looked at Harry attentively

"That's better" he said "Now; would you please make a path before my girlfriend starts flinging hexes?" He wasn't exaggerating for Hermione looked ready to do just about that. The girls began dispersing, murmuring disappointedly under their breaths.

"So, Potter," Malfoy drawled, "Has the Mudblood started putting out for you yet?" Harry felt his temper start to slide out of control and only Hermione's firm grasp prevented him from losing it entirely

"Malfoy," Harry said in a deadly calm tone, "If you want your important parts to remain intact, I 'suggest' you turn around right now and walk away!" Malfoy gulped and reflexively moved his hands over his crotch. The pale-haired Slytherin's eyes suddenly went wide and he beat a hasty exit.

Hermione giggled and Harry whirled to face her.

"What's so funny?"

"Oh just that I cast a wandless Reducing Charm on Malfoys 'significant parts'." Harry smothered a laugh and then did his best imitation of Malfoy:

"'But Madam Pomfrey, I swear they were bigger than that'." They enjoyed a good, much needed laugh.

Several days before the Yule Ball, Harry was in the common room when saw Hermione coming toward him. She looked angry. Very angry.

"What's wrong, 'Mione?" Harry asked

"It's over between us, you hear that!" She yelled for everyone to hear. Harry blinked what's going on here? "And don't even think that I'm going to the ball with you either, the effrontery of it all..." She started walking away and Harry quickly got out his wand and ran in front of her. Something wasn't quite right, he could feel it.

"What was the arithmantic formula of my spell for the first task?"

"Get out of my way!" she demanded.

"Answer the question and I will." Harry replied in a cold tone

"I...uh..."

"Stupefy!" Harry shouted and the fake-Hermione collapsed to the ground "Mobilicorpus!" Harry said and floated the body to the Room of Requirement, which took the appearance of an interrogation cell. He then ran to the library just in time to see a fake-Harry walk out.

"Stupefy!" Harry said and the fake-Harry collapsed. Hermione came running out with ruffled clothing which looked like there were attempts to remove it and Harry grabbed her.

"Let go of me you..." She angrily said only to widen her eyes when she saw the two Harry's.

"Polyjuice?" Hermione said in a much calmer tone and Harry nodded:

"I had one too," he said, "Let's go see who these two people are."

JK Rowling owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter Twenty

After another forty-five minutes, the Polyjuice wore off and the two doppelgangers reverted to their natural forms. Harry frowned and then said; "Ron and Ginny Weasley. Why am I not surprised? That must be how Ginny was able to buy her school supplies – Dumbledore must have given her the money for them provided she did what he wanted."

He was about to say something else when he picked up a stray thought in Ginny's head.

"There seems to be a dark curse in Ginny's head." Harry said, Hermione looking interested. "Binky!"

The house-elf appeared. Harry told him what he was suspecting and asked the elf to have a look, which he did.

"Master Harry, it seems little miss here is acting under compulsion charms and the Imperious curse to work against you. I also take a look in Nasty Weasley's head and Weasley family are plotting against you with Dumbledore – they want Black and Potter family money. Dumbledore has other things planned. Marauder twins and little miss are not involved. Nasty Weasley plans to use little miss and Miss. Hermione as sex toys."

Harry was going purple with rage at that news.

"I bet you that Arthur Weasley disowning Ginny at that farce of a trial was just a mockery just to get into my good graces." Harry said.

"We'll get them soon enough Harry, but we need the twins to prank Ron and we need to get Ginny somewhere safe."

"Sirius – he can place Ginny under the protection of the House of Black." Harry said, getting his mirror out and contacting Sirius. The two told him what they had found out.

"Since she was disowned from her family, I can offer her protection under the House of Black. I'll sort out the paperwork and get back to you. Hopefully, I can do something before Christmas."

Ron Weasley woke up in his dormitory and went to the bathroom. He looked in the mirror and did a double-take and checked himself before screaming like a little girl. His screams brought the other fourth year boys in.

"Ron, what's wrong?" Seamus asked.

"What's wrong?" Ron yelled, "What's wrong? I look like bloody Dumbledore. That's what's wrong."

"No you don't," Dean said, slightly confused, "You look perfectly normal."

"What are you..."

A thoroughly cloaked Ron took a bite of his breakfast and immediately spat it out when it tasted like vomit. Ron took another bite and spate it out again. Frantically, Ron began sampling random foods and they all tasted like vomit.

Harry, Hermione, Fred, and George were doing all they could to bite back laughter.

Ron discovered that his pumpkin juice tasted normal and began gulping it down by the gallon, inadvertently setting into motion phase two. Ron suddenly began babbling incoherently. The four pranksters no longer had to hold back laughter for everyone was engaged in it now. The pranks became less funny when Snape deducted fifty points from Gryffindor 'for excessive laughter'. Then again, points were worthless this year. Ginny came up to them.

"I remember what has been going on," she said, "Dumbledore and Mum put me under the Imperious curse when I refused to help them control you and gain your money. I'm sorry for what I've done – please help me."

Harry promised to do what he could. He later told Hermione that with her under Sirius' protection, it meant they could keep an eye on her to see if the dark curses and memories were planted there or if Ginny was really acting under the Imperioius.

The next day, which happened to be the day of the Yule Ball, Ron noticed that he was back to normal... except for the fact that his face was covered in pimples. Thus it was that the residents of Gryffindor tower once again awoke to screaming.

Harry rolled his eyes and saw the new fallen snow outside the window. He grabbed his presents and walked downstairs through the crowd where he saw Hermione waiting for him. She was wearing her pink bathrobe and greeted him with a passionate kiss.

"Mmm...Christmas lips..." Harry said dreamily, "I wonder how they compare to birthday lips?"

Hermione giggled and saucily replied: "Well, I guess you're just going to have to wait and see, Mr. Potter."

They began opening their presents. Sirius gave him a handy penknife that would unlock any lock and undo any knot. Remus gave him a book on dark creatures of Europe. Tonks gave him on advanced defensive spells. Hermione gave him a book about the Quidditch teams of Britain and Ireland. Hagrid gave him a box of sweets that Harry immediately checked for potions and spells. It came up clean.

"What are we going to do now?" Harry asked.

"Dancing lessons in the Room of Requirement." Hermione said.

"But I already know how to dance" Harry said, thinking back to his 'gentleman' lessons from growing up.

"I still want you to get a refresher," Hermione said and Harry sighed in reluctant agreement.

Ginny received a letter saying that Sirius' application to make her his ward was accepted and so could now call herself Ginny Black. It also stated that if what was revealed was true, he would adopt her the following Christmas.

Harry put on his dress robes, black with a red and gold pattern and the Potter, Black, and Gryffindor crests, and walked down to the common room to wait for Hermione. When he saw her walking down, he would've sworn that his jaw hit the floor. She was dressed in



robes made of a floaty periwinkle-blue material. Her hair wasn't bushy anymore, but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. And her teeth! They were perfectly straight and normal. She was nervously smiling.

"You're beautiful!" Harry breathed, "What happened to your teeth?"

"Well...when Madam Pomfrey was shrinking my teeth, she gave me a mirror and told me to say when they were back to normal and...I let her continue on just a bit longer."

"I can't believe I didn't notice it earlier." Harry said.

"I was wondering when you would," Hermione said, "But it doesn't matter. You're very handsome."

Hermione's eyebrows went up slightly before she shrugged and took Harry's proffered arm. They walked down to the Great Hall. McGonagall was wearing a tartan robe and said to them when they approached.

"Ahh...good, you're here, now we can get started." They got in line with the other champions and their dates. Cedric was going with Cho, Fleur had Roger Davies, and Viktor Krum had some girl from his fan club who happened to have a striking resemblance to Hermione.

The oak doors opened and they proceeded into the Hall. Needless to say, there were quite a few stares, whispers and murmurs. After what seemed like an eternity, they reached the Heads table where they sat down. Harry found himself sitting next to Mr. Crouch. After the food had been consumed, everyone stood up and Dumbledore waved his wand. All the tables zoomed back along the walls, leaving the floor clear. Dumbledore then conjured a platform with instruments and the Weird Sisters trooped onto the stage to enthusiastic applause. Harry, Hermione, and the others began dancing. All of Harry's attention was on Hermione. He was glad now that he had had the refresher, especially when he noticed other couples that weren't so lucky. The first dance was a slow one, but the second was much faster. After half a dozen dances of varying speeds, Hermione said that she was hot and needed a drink. Harry just couldn't resist.

"Well of course you're hot," he quipped, "What else would you be?" Hermione laughed and they went over to get some butterbeer. The two noticed that Ron wasn't there. They then went for a walk outside, slowly sipping their drinks. They came upon Hagrid and Madam Maxine talking together and were about to leave when Harry noticed a beetle crawling along the back of a stone reindeer.

"Hermione?" he said quietly, "Is it usual for beetles to be out this time of year?"

"No" she replied, "Why..." Hermione frowned upon seeing the beetle. "That is odd" she said and the beetle took flight. Hermione whipped her wand out, but it was too late. The beetle was gone.

"Let's get back to the dance," Harry said. "At least we know now how she's been doing it."

Midnight came far too quickly. As Harry and Hermione made their way back to the Gryffindor common room, they paused when they heard Cedric say:

"Harry, wait up."

"Yes, Cedric?"

"Have you figured out the egg yet?"

"No, why?"

"Take a bath with it," Cedric said, "Trust me, it'll help you."

"Alright" Harry said, deciding that he had nothing to lose.

The very next day, Harry was in his bathing trunks and pacing back and forth in front of the Room of Requirement. I need a room to solve this egg...I need a room to solve this egg...I need a room to solve this egg. The door appeared and Harry walked in to see a moderately sized bathroom full of foamy water. There was a picture of a sleeping mermaid on the wall. Harry got in the tub and opened the egg again. Just as quickly he closed it again and began thinking. Harry put the egg underwater and opened it again. It did not wail this time, but instead caused a gurgling song that he couldn't quite make

out. Harry took a deep breath and plunged his head under the water. He heard a chorus of eerie voices singing:

Come and seek us where our voices sound,

We cannot sing above the ground,

An hour long you have to look

To recover what we took.

Harry popped back up and began repeating the song in his mind, over and over again. He looked at the portrait of the sleeping mermaid and his eyes went wide Of course! He thought. Merpeople.

"Okay, let's go through it one more time." Hermione said, as she paced.

"Come and seek us where we sound, we cannot sing above the ground." Harry recited.

"Merpeople, as you've already figured out, next."

"An hour long you'll have to look, to recover what we took,"

"Again, obvious, you only have one hour to look for whatever it is they're going to take."

"But past an hour-the prospect's black. Too late, it's gone, it won't come back."

"That's the part I don't understand," Hermione said, "Why wouldn't you get it back? And what's it going to be?"

"I don't know," Harry said. "But why don't we focus on the bigger problem, breathing underwater for an hour."

"Well, there's the Bubble-Head charm, for one." Hermione said.

"Yeah," Harry replied and got out his mirror, "Let's see if Sirius has anything to say. 'Snuffles.'" Sirius's face appeared in the mirror.

"Hello, Harry," Sirius smiled, "What's up?"

"I need a way to breathe underwater for an hour," Harry explained, "Got any ideas?"

"Gillyweed," Sirius instantly supplied, "It's a plant, somewhat hard to find, but it works for an hour. Hold on a minute, I'll go see if we have any." Sirius's face disappeared for several minutes and then reappeared, "Good luck, and we have a whole jar. I'll send it over with one of the elves. Good luck, Harry."

"Thanks," Harry said and the mirror deactivated. Moments later, a house-elf appeared with the jar of gillyweed. Harry thanked the elf, who vanished again. He noticed that Hermione had a mischievous smile.

"Alright," he said, "Spill the beans."

"I was just thinking," She said, "Maybe we could...try it out...the gillyweed...you know...in the Room of Requirement." Harry's eyes lit and he smiled:

"That's an excellent idea!"

Please review, with thanks to my betas

The wording for the song came from the Goblet of Fire film, which I thought was sang nicely, although the film makers would have scored a few more brownie points if they had gotten Katherine Jenkins to sing the words instead, very wishful thinking on my part.

As usual, JKR owns Harry Potter, not me.

## Chapter 21

Hermione jolted awake in her dormitory. She was feeling very...odd.... incomplete...empty...like a part of her had just...left of all a sudden. There was a burst of flame and Hermione saw Aeled land in front of her. The phoenix trilled something but Hermione didn't understand it:

What's going on here? Hermione thought I've never had a problem understanding him before?

"I'm sorry, I don't understand," she said. Aeled gestured with his head toward the door, "You want me to go downstairs?" Aeled nodded.

"Alright," she said and the phoenix left in another burst of flame. Hermione put on her pink robe and slippers, grabbed her wand, and walked downstairs to see Sirius, Remus, and Tonks also there. Aeled was flying around the room, clearly agitated.

"What's going on?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea," Sirius said, gesturing to Aeled, "That crazy bird just came at us in the night and brought us here." Aeled flew around the common room again, this time touching his beak to each of them and then flying up again.

"I think he wants us to come with him," Hermione said.

Albus Dumbledore used his position as headmaster to manipulate the wards to allow him to apparate to his office. He was feeling very good today because there was no way to reverse the ritual before anyone would find out; he had personally made sure of that! Pity he had to use someone else, he would have preferred to use Ginny Weasley but he would have been found out otherwise and put in Azkaban. Maybe I can get Aberforth to break out that bottle of 1776 Firewhisky he's been saving.

Aeled brought Hermione, Sirius, Remus, and Tonks to a ritual room. Harry was there, in the middle of a pentagram. Next to him was a Hufflepuff girl Hermione didn't recognize.

"What's happening?" Tonks asked.

"I think it's some kind of ritual," Sirius said, "Though, I'll have to go to Grimmauld Place to see for certain. Get Harry to safety," they nodded and then Aeled disappeared with Sirius. Hermione, Remus and Tonks picked up Harry and took him back to the Gryffindor common room.

Sirius Black was frantically searching the Black Library. There was absolutely no organization to it at all and it took a full hour to find the book he was looking for: Keeping your Line Pure. It was a very thick tome with yellowed pages and a binding so old and worn it was starting to fall apart. Aeled took him back to the Gryffindor common room and they began poring over the pages, searching for the ritual that Dumbledore had used. Though there were, it turned out, many such rituals, only one seemed to suggest itself, given what they had seen in the ritual room:

The Ritual of Loves Purification

Subject: the child

Object: Mudblood

Target: Appropriate Pureblood

This ritual is designed to sever any soul-bonds between the child and the mudblood and to establish a soul-bond between the child and the pureblood.

They skipped the requirements, preparation, and incantation, skimmed the effects and went straight to counters. Only there were none.

"No!" Hermione said, desperately rereading the page, "This can't be. There has to be a way around this."

"There is," said Sirius but he had a worrisome expression on his face, "Or at least, there might be, but..."

"Well, what is it?" Hermione asked impatiently. She was ready to do just about anything for Harry right now. Sirius coughed and cleared his throat.

"This ritual is designed to create a soul bond. There are many different levels of soul bonds but the deepest one, and the only one that can't be broken, is a marriage bond. However, that may not be necessary for Harry's case. A betrothal bond is almost as deep and almost as unbreakable. Certainly, it's deeper than what this ritual does, that much I am sure of."

"What makes you so certain?" Hermione asked.

"Because a betrothal cannot be broken off but an engagement can," explained Sirius, "Don't ask me why, that's just how things are. You see, each of the Old Families has a set of betrothal rings which create the soul bond. That way, if one of their children somehow ended up engaged to a muggleborn or other undesirable person..."

"They could sever the engagement and replace it with a betrothal to a pureblood," Hermione finished and Sirius nodded.

"Exactly. The rings were actually designed to supplement rituals like these instead of counteracting them, though they should still serve our purpose."

"And what if they don't?" Hermione asked.

"Well," Sirius swallowed. "Then there's always the wedding rings."

It did not take Sirius long to find the Black betrothal rings and Aeled returned him to the Gryffindor common room.

"Oh hell," Sirius suddenly said, smacking his forehead.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"I just remembered," said Sirius "Harry is a member of the Black Family and since I am the head of the Black Family, I can put the ring on him with no problems, however, one of your parents will have to put the other ring on you in order for it to work properly."

"Oh, I see," said Hermione and looked at Aeled who took them to the Granger's house. Hermione ran upstairs and shook her parents awake.

"Hermione, what the bloody hell are you doing here?" Dan Granger asked, "For that matter, how did you get here?"

"I'll explain later, but you have to come downstairs now." Dan and Emma Granger exchanged dubious looks and then decided to humour their daughter for the moment. They went downstairs and saw Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Tonks with an unconscious Harry on the floor.

"Okay, what's going on?" Emma asked.

"Well, it's like this," said Sirius and he explained the ritual Dumbledore had performed as best he could, "And the only way I can think of to counter it is to use these betrothal rings."

"Let me get this straight," Dan said, "You want to betroth Harry and Hermione?"

"Yes," said Sirius, "However, as you are Hermione's parents, you must put the ring on her at the exact moment that I put a similar ring on Harry."

"Well, I must say," Emma Granger said, "That I certainly expected these two to end up together; one only has to watch their behaviour to see that, but..."

"But you think they're a bit too young," said Sirius and the Grangers nodded, "Well, I happen to think so too, but unfortunately, there's no other way that I can think of to counteract this ritual, barring a marriage ceremony."

"All the same," Mr. Granger said, "I'm just not comfortable with this..."

"Well, please," said Sirius, "You have to make up your mind quickly, before the ritual completes."



"I want to do this, please," Hermione said, "I love Harry so very much. I would do anything for him and I'm sure he would do exactly the same for me."

"And I still say no," said Dan Granger, "At least not until I know Harry better..."

"Dad," Hermione said, "Once this ritual completes, Harry will be a very different person and..." Dan and Emma Granger saw the tears rolling down Hermione's cheeks and Dan let out a sigh.

"Oh, alright," Dan said reluctantly, "I do it," Sirius gave Dan one of the rings and said:

"Okay, on the count of three: One...two...three..." Dan slipped the ring on Hermione. Simultaneously, Sirius put the other ring on Harry. Harry and Hermione were engulfed by golden light. Hermione felt another presence in her mind but it was almost like it was asleep. Harry opened his eyes and looked around in puzzlement and the presence grew stronger.

What's going on here, where am I? Harry thought, what happened?

Oh my! Hermione thought.

Oh my what?

Harry?

Hermione! Whoa, this is weird. What happened?

Must be a side effect of the rings.

What rings? Harry looked down at his hand and saw a plain, platinum band on his finger. A similar one was on Hermione's finger. What happened?

Long story short, Dumbledore performed some ritual on you and the only way to counter it was to be betrothed.

I see...well, at least it was to someone I love

You don't know how happy I am to hear you say that

What? That I love you? It's the honest truth

Yeah, but when we get back to Hogwarts, I'll show you that ritual book....

"Um, Hello?" Sirius said "Anybody home."

"We are just fine." Harry and Hermione said at the same time. Sirius didn't have the heart to tell the Grangers that a side effect would be that the two would be able to have telepathic conversations.

Albus Dumbledore was shocked beyond belief the next day to see Harry and Hermione causally stride in hands clasped like nothing had happened.

What's going on? He thought desperately: How did they do it? Dumbledore did not like what he was about to do but he was nearing the limits of his patience with Potter.

Harry and Hermione sat down and began eating, keeping silent except when necessary. Hermione was reaching for the pitcher of pumpkin juice when Parvati saw her finger and squealed:

"A betrothal ring!" she exclaimed and silence reigned in the Great Hall for one brief moment before returning to normal. "Oooh...who's the lucky..." Parvati saw the identical ring on Harry's finger and squealed again. "Congratulations!" Harry made an effort at a smile.

If only they knew...He thought If only they knew. Of course, the look on Dumbledore's face was absolutely priceless. Hermione suppressed a giggle. After breakfast came more congratulations from both male and female Gryffindors and even a few Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs, including Cedric Diggory. Even Ginny was pleased for them. Then Fred and George walked up:

"We just wanted to thank you for you have just won us even more Galleons for our shop, though we did not expect it so soon." George said.

Harry and Hermione grinned.

"To be honest neither did we."

The next day Harry and Hermione had to face the inevitable article in the Daily Prophet

Britain's Most Eligible Bachelor Taken!

Yesterday, Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were observed wearing a set of betrothal rings. It looks like the Britain's most eligible bachelor has just been snatched up for good.

The article went on to relate Harry and Hermione's relationship with surprising accuracy. And the following day brought the first hate mail for Hermione. In the end, Harry had Binky deal with them.

On the first day of term, the Daily Prophet ran an article:

Dumbledore's Giant Mistake

By Rita Skeeter

Albus Dumbledore, eccentric headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, has never been afraid to make controversial staff appointments. In September of this year, he hired Alastor 'Mad-Eye' Moody, the notoriously jinx-happy ex-Auror, to teach Defence Against the Dark Arts, a decision that caused many raised eyebrows at the Ministry of Magic, given Moody's well-known habit of attacking anyone who makes a sudden movement in his presence. Mad-Eye Moody, however, looks responsible and kindly when set beside the part-human Dumbledore employs as Gamekeeper.

Rubeus Hagrid, who admits to being expelled from Hogwarts in his third year, has enjoyed the position of gamekeeper at the school ever since, a job secured for him by Dumbledore. Dumbledore has also turned a blind eye to Hagrid's activities. Three years ago, Hagrid somehow acquired and hatched a Norwegian Ridgeback dragon egg. Though fortunately, the dragon was later taken to a reservation by dragon keeper Charlie Weasley, the fact remains that Dragon breeding was outlawed by the Warlocks' Convention of 1709. However, neither Dumbledore nor Hagrid seem to care for this law. As they have again demonstrated this year.

In a conversation with this reporter last month, Hagrid admitted to breeding creatures he had dubbed 'Blast-Ended Skrewts,' highly dangerous crosses between manticores and fire-crabs. The creation of new breeds of magical creature is, of course, an activity usually closely observed by the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. Hagrid and Dumbledore, however, consider themselves above such petty restrictions.

"I was just having some fun," Hagrid said before hastily changing the subject.

As if this was not enough, this reporter has unearthed evidence that Hagrid is not a pure-human as he has pretended in the past. He is, in fact, a half-giant. His mother, we can exclusively reveal, is none other than the giantess Fridwulfa, whose whereabouts are currently unknown.

Bloodthirsty and brutal, the giants brought themselves to the point of extinction by warring amongst themselves during the last century. The handful that remained joined the ranks of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, and were responsible for some of the worst mass Muggle killings of his reign of terror.

While many of the giants who served He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named were killed by Aurors working against the Dark Side, Fridwulfa was not among them. It is possible she escaped to one of the giant communities still existing in foreign mountain ranges. If Hagrid's antics are any guide, however, Fridwulfa's son appears to have inherited her brutal nature.

In a bizarre twist, Hagrid is reputed to have developed a close friendship with the boy who brought around You-Know-Who's fall from power-thereby driving Hagrid's own mother, like the rest of You-Know-Who's supporters, into hiding. Perhaps, Harry Potter is unaware of the unpleasant truth about his large friend-but Albus Dumbledore surely has a duty to ensure that Harry Potter, along with his fellow students, is warned about the dangers of associating with part-giants.

Harry furiously tore up the newspaper. How did she find out about Norbert? Harry really didn't care that Hagrid was half-giant as he judged people by their actions not their heritage. He then sighed Okay, maybe things are getting a bit out of hand. I want to bring

down Dumbledore, but I don't want to hurt my friends in the process. Harry relaxed a bit when he felt Hermione's soothing presence in his mind.

The Slytherin's were all snickering and laughing. Malfoy loudly said.

"Well, I guess that's the end of Hagrid. Maybe now, he'll go back to Azkaban where he belongs."

Harry's anger returned and he clenched his fist, trying not to react. Just then, however, the doors to the Great Hall were flung open and Minister Fudge came strolling in with six Hit-Wizards at his back.

"Rubeus Hagrid!" Fudge bellowed, "You are under arrest for illegal dragon breeding. Please come quietly or we will not hesitate to use force." The Hit-Wizards started advancing toward the Head Table, wands at the ready. Harry had had quite enough. He jumped out of his seat and Hermione found herself standing up too.

Two voices shouted. "Aeled!" Everyone looked at them and then up at the burst of flame that signified Aeled's arrival. "Get Hagrid to safety." Aeled trilled an affirmative and flew towards Hagrid. The Hit-Wizards recovered from their shock and immediately began firing hexes at the phoenix. Aeled dodged the spells, grabbed Hagrid, and they left in another burst of flame.

Fudge and the Hit-Wizards whirled on Harry.

"Do you realize what you have just done, Harry?" Fudge asked in astonishment

"I just saved my friend...." Harry began, "...from going to Azkaban"

"You know I could arrest you for obstruction of justice" Fudge said and Harry and Hermione only chuckled

"And I can just see the headlines now - Boy-Who-Lived Sent to Azkaban!"

"I guarantee that your political career would not survive that." Suppressed anger at Dumbledore was starting to come out. "Plus, I still have to compete in this stupid Tournament or I'll die. And you wouldn't want that, would you?" Fudge glared at him for a moment

and then stalked out of the Great Hall in defeat. Harry belatedly realized that he had just ruined his chances of getting Skeeter to print a retraction. Oh well, I suppose.

After breakfast, Dumbledore asked Harry to stay behind

"What do you want, Headmaster?"

"Harry, my boy," Dumbledore said in his grandfather voice, "I much appreciate your saving my gamekeeper..."

"I didn't do this for you, Headmaster," Harry said, his temper starting to flare, "I did it for Hagrid. Now, if that's all, I must be getting to class."

"Wait," Dumbledore said, "Where is Hagrid?"

"In a safe place," Harry replied.

After classes, Harry and Hermione went to Hagrid's hut and banged on the door.

"It's us, Hagrid" Harry said.

"We don't care that you're a half-giant," Hermione added. The door opened and Hagrid let them in.

"I jus want ter say, Harry," Hagrid said, pulling them into bone-crushing hugs, "Thank you."

"Hey, what're friends for?"

"But, I fear that your saving me from prison was fer nothing. What if te parents demand my sacking?"

"It's still Dumbledore's decision," Harry said, really doubting that Dumbledore would sack Hagrid. "Wouldn't hurt to make sure though... So you can relax."

"But they're still goin to complain..."

"And you can't please everyone," Hermione said

"That's simply impossible."

"Just go about your job like normal." A smile appeared on Hagrid's face and tears began falling. Hagrid thanked them profusely, all the while rambling about how great Harry and Dumbledore were and how stupid he had been acting. Harry, however, had a sneaking suspicion of just how Skeeter had found out about Norbert. Dumbledore has much to pay for! He decided to put the plan that was rapidly taking shape into motion

"Say, Hagrid," Harry said "Do you know anything about horcruxes?"

"Hor-what?" Hagrid said "What are those?"

"Never mind," Hermione said with a glare at Harry who only shrugged. Hermione grabbed Harry's arm and pulled him out of the hut and to an empty classroom "Harry, just what the bloody hell do you think you're doing?" She yelled "Do you have any idea just how lose Hagrid's tongue is...?"

"Would you just please relax, Hermione?"

"Relax!" Hermione shouted, "Relax? How can you tell me to relax when you just told Hagrid about our research into horcruxes, now he's going to tell Dumbledore!"

"And Dumbledore will see him as still being useful and not sack him," Harry replied and Hermione looked at him in astonishment, her anger melting away.

"Harry, you are brilliant!" She then took Harry to a nearby broom closet to properly show him what she thought of his brilliance.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

As usual, I don't own anything

## Chapter 22

Albus Dumbledore was wondering what to do about Hagrid when the half-giant came knocking on his door.

"Come in," Dumbledore said and Hagrid walked in.

"Professor Dumbledore, sir," Hagrid said, "The other day, Harry came to me asking if I knew anythin' about horcruxes." Dumbledore choked on the lemon drop he had just put in his mouth. "I was jus' wonderin', sir, what are horcruxes?" Hagrid finished

"Dark magic," said Dumbledore, "Very dark magic, but nothing you should be worried about." So much for sacking Hagrid, Dumbledore. He just gave me vital information about Harry. Apparently, he knows a lot more than he should at this point. Dumbledore was once again absolutely infuriated that Harry was not cooperating and proving resistant to his control. Okay, so he knows about the horcruxes but he can't know what Voldemort's are, where they are and how many they are. There was still a way to salvage the situation.

On Saturday, Harry and Hermione went into Hogsmeade. The first place they went was the Three Broomsticks. The pub was as crowded as ever. They ordered butterbeers and then Hermione pointed out the mirror behind the bar. Ludo Bagman was reflected in there, sitting in a shadowy corner with a bunch of goblins and talking very rapidly. The goblins all had their arms crossed and were looking quite menacing.

"I wonder what Bagman did to get the goblins upset at him?" Harry whispered.

"No clue," Hermione replied "though it's obviously very serious for them to come all the way here."

Suddenly, Bagman saw Harry and stood up. "In a moment, in a moment," Bagman said brusquely to the goblins. He then bustled over the pub to Harry, his boyish grin on his face.



"Harry!" he said, "How are you? Been hoping to run into you! Everything going all right?"

"Just peachy." Harry replied.

"Wonder if I could I have a quick, private word, Harry?" Bagman said eagerly. "You couldn't give us a moment, could you?" He said to Hermione. She sighed, rolled her eyes, and went off to find a table. Bagman led Harry along to the end of the bar furthest from Madam Rosmerta.

"Well, I just thought I'd congratulate you again on your splendid performance against that Horntail, Harry" Bagman said "Really superb." Bagman furtively glanced into the mirror at the goblins and then looked back at Harry "Listen, Harry," Bagman said in a much lower voice "I feel very bad about all of this...you were thrown into this tournament, you didn't volunteer for it...and if..." Bagman's voice became even lower "if I can help you at all...a prod in the right direction..." Harry quickly took a step back and shook his head. What is he playing at? Why is he trying to cheat?

"No, thank you sir," Harry said, "I've already figured out the clue and what to do."

Bagman shrugged looking slightly disappointed and said, "Well, good luck then I suppose." He started to walk away and was promptly confronted by Fred and George.

"Hello, Mr. Bagman," Fred said brightly.

"Can we buy you a drink?" George added.

"Er...no," Bagman quickly said with one last glance at Harry, "No, thank you boys." Now, Fred and George looked just as disappointed as Bagman.

"Well, I must dash," Bagman said, "Nice seeing you all. Good luck, Harry!" Bagman hurried out of the pub. The goblins got up and followed him. Harry turned to Fred and George.

"What was all that about?" he said.

"We could ask you the same question," Fred said. Harry looked around and then leaned in close and lowered his tone.

"He's trying to cheat so that I'll win," Harry said, "He tried the same thing before the First Task. Why, I don't know..." Fred and George exchanged looks and then Fred said in that same low tone,

"Bagman still owes us money from the Quidditch World Cup,"

"We correctly bet on the outcome..." George said, "...but Bagman paid us in leprechaun gold."

"Hmmm..." Harry said, scratching his chin, "Something tells me that you're not the only people he's cheated; those goblins perhaps?"

"That's what it looks like," George said, "Bagman must be betting that you'll win the Tournament so that he can pay off his debts. Lee Jordan's dad's had a lot of problems getting money out of Bagman too."

"I'm almost tempted to lose on purpose just to see the look on his face." Harry chuckled "Almost. But I'm not that cruel."

"Or that bad," Fred said

"You would have to try very hard ..."

"...to lose on purpose." Harry chuckled again and they continued,

"Well, I do hope you come through..." Fred said.

"...so that we can get our money," George finished.

In Charms, Flitwick had them practicing the Banishing charm on pillows. Harry could already see the potential combat usage of this spell and concentrated extra hard on learning it. Fortunately, it came to him a lot easier than the Summoning Charm had. His bond with Hermione didn't hurt either. Another benefit of the bond, they discovered, was increased progress on their Arithmantic calculations for the basilisk armour.

In the Duelling Club, however, they discovered that they could not effectively duel each other because they always knew what the

person was about to do. Fortunately, Cedric and Cho revealed that they were secretly studying Occlumency and had mastered it to the point where only a master Legilimens would be able to probe their minds and duel at the same time. However, even though Harry could no longer read Cedric's mind, their duels still ended in a draw. Cedric knew more spells and could use most of them non-verbally, but the spells that Harry did know had a lot more power behind them and then of course there were his panther-like reflexes not to mention his wandless abilities. And since they weren't duelling to the death, Harry had to hold back his knowledge of the dark arts and of parselmagic. Hermione's duels with Cho also often ended in a draw for similar reasons.

The day finally came for the Second Task and Harry could not find Hermione anywhere. Where the bloody hell is she? Harry thought as he walked out to the lake with handful of gillyweed. He could feel her in their bond, but it was like she was unconscious. What disturbed him even more was that, as he got closer to the lake, her presence got stronger. Ludo Bagman went among the champions, spacing them out at ten feet intervals. When he got to Harry, he again tried to offer last minute advice and Harry again turned him away. Bagman returned to the judges table and cast the Sonorous charm on himself.

"Well, all our champions are ready for the second task, which will start on my whistle. They have precisely one hour to recover what has been taken from them. On the count of three, then. One...two...three!" Bagman blew the whistle and the stands erupted into cheers and applause. Harry stuffed the gillyweed into his mouth and began wading out into the lake. The water was so cold that his skin felt fiery instead of icy. He chewed the gillyweed as fast as he could and swallowed. The gills appeared on his neck and his hands and feet became webbed. Harry flung himself into the water and began swimming. Harry noticed how clearly he could see and that he didn't need to blink. He swam deeper and deeper and suddenly encountered grindylows, small horned water demons. They came at him out of the weed and Harry quickly pointed his wand at them. He still hadn't had much luck with non-verbal spells, but maybe...

"Relashio!" he shouted except no sound came out. A large bubble issued from his mouth and his wand sent a jet of boiling water at the grindylows, causing them to sprout angry red patches on their green

skin. Harry continued swimming, using the bond as a compass, shooting more jets of hot water when necessary. After what seemed like fifteen minutes, he started hearing the mersong and started swimming faster and faster, over the mervillage and finally he saw them. Four figures tied to the bottom. One of them was Hermione, another was Fleur's sister, the third was Cho Chang and the fourth was Ron Weasley.

What the hell is going on? Harry thought and sped towards the hostages. Harry pointed his wand at Hermione's chain and instantly the merpeople swarmed around him.

"No!" one of them said, "She is not your hostage."

"But she's my girlfriend!" Harry said, "Actually, she's my betrothed."

"Your betrothed is fine, do not fear," the merperson said, "However, you can only retrieve your own hostage. Leave the others." She pointed at Ron.

Cedric arrived; he had cast a Bubblehead charm on himself. Cedric cut Cho free and began swimming away. This distracted the Merpeople so Harry freed Hermione and headed towards the surface.

Moments later, Viktor Krum showed up. He had partially transfigured himself into a shark and grabbed for a chain but his hostage wasn't there. As Harry and Hermione reached the surface, she opened her eyes, blinked and then cast a spell to negate the gillyweed. They made their way to the shore and sat down where Madam Pomfrey shoved a hot potion down his throat that instantly warmed him. He was warmed even more when Hermione gave him a passionate kiss. Viktor Krum returned to the surface with Ron, determined to get some points.

Fleur came up with her sister just as time ran out. Suddenly, Viktor frowned:

"You haff a water beetle in your hair, Hermy-own-ninny." Now Hermione frowned. What was a water beetle doing out at this time of year? Harry apparently thought the same thing and quickly conjured a glass jar while Hermione summoned the beetle into it. She then conjured several twigs and leaves as well as a lid with holes to

breath; finally, he put an Unbreakable charm on the jar. They then looked over at the judges and saw Dumbledore speaking to the Merchieftainess.

"Ladies and Gentleman" Ludo Bagman's voice boomed, "We have reached a decision on the scoring. We will be awarding marks out of fifty for each of the champions as follows: Fleur Delacour, demonstrated excellent use of the Bubble-Head Charm and returned last. She is awarded twenty five points." There was some applause from the stands and Bagman continued, "Cedric Diggory, who also used the Bubble-Head Charm, was the first to return with his hostage and before the time limit expired. We therefore award him forty-seven points." The Hufflepuffs cheered, "Viktor Krum used an incomplete form of Transfiguration, which was nevertheless effective, and was third to return with his hostage, although he rescued the wrong person, the fault not being his own, before the time limit expired. We award him forty points." After some unspectacular applause from Durmstrang, Bagman continued, "Harry Potter used gillyweed to great effect, and returned second, also with the wrong hostage, though still within the time limit. However, we have conversed with the Merchieftainess, who has explained that Mr. Potter arrived first at the hostages and would've returned first were it not for a misunderstanding on whom his hostage was. A misunderstanding that we believe is entirely understandable, given the...circumstances." There was a great deal of murmurs amongst the crowd. "We therefore award Mr. Potter forty-five points," Bagman finished and the Gryffindors erupted into cheers.

By the next Hogsmeade weekend, the weather had turned dry and very windy, often blowing the owls off their course. Harry and Hermione had blackmailed Rita Skeeter into silence and decided to release her at the end of the year.

In DADA, Moody gave them a hex-deflection test. He would cast various hexes and grade them based upon the strength of their shield charms. The members of the Duelling club did fairly well, though afterwards Harry could still feel his ears twitching from the Twitchy Ear jinx that had gotten through his shield.

About the only good news was that their spell to create the basilisk armour was ready. Harry looked at the tap in the bathroom and hissed 'open'. Hermione's eyes went wide when she realized that she understood it. At first she thought that Harry hadn't done it right,

but then the sink moved away to reveal the chute. Hermione tentatively conjured the image of a snake in her head and said

'Stairs'. Harry turned to look at her in surprise when the stairs took shape

"I don't know how to explain it," Hermione said "Maybe it's a side effect of the bond? I mean, that's how I can understand Aeled."

"True," Harry said and he really couldn't think of a different explanation. Once they were inside, Harry and Hermione pointed their wands at the basilisk and said a long incantation in Latin. Before the two of them were even halfway through it, they were already exhausted. They managed to complete the spell and then promptly fell to the ground. The basilisk skin began glowing and several large sections detached themselves and formed into a pair of skin-tight two piece suits. Their heads and their hands were now the only parts of their bodies that would be unprotected, a vast improvement from before and the spell had also made hoods and gloves anyway so their face was really the only thing they had to worry about. Harry and Hermione turned around so they were facing away from each other, shed their robes put the armour on and then put their robes back on top of it. A few quick glamour charms served to conceal the rest of the armour.

"Dressing is going to be a pain" Hermione said

"Oh Merlin," Harry grabbed his head "I hadn't thought about that. Guess that's the price we have to pay, eh?" Hermione chuckled and nodded.

In the last week of May, Professor McGonagall held Harry back in Transfiguration.

"You are to go down to the Quidditch field tonight at nine o'clock, Potter," she told him "Mr. Bagman will be there to tell the champions about the third task." And so, that night, he went out to the Quidditch field.

"What do you reckon it's going to be?" Cedric asked Harry "Fleur keeps going on about underground tunnels; she reckons that we have to find treasure."

"That wouldn't be too bad," Harry said thoughtfully. Grubbly-Plank's most recent Care of Magical Creatures lesson had involved Nifflers. He could simply use one of those. "Maybe with an obstacle course thrown in." He was thinking now about Hagrid's Blast-Ended Skrewts; they were continuing to grow with no end in sight.

They reached the Quidditch stadium and saw that it was no longer flat. Hedges now crisscrossed in every direction.

"What have they done to it?" Cedric said indignantly.

"Well, what do you know?" Harry said "Maybe I was right about the obstacle course part."

"Hello, there," a cheery voice called. They turned to see Ludo Bagman with Krum and Fleur amongst the hedges. They climbed over the hedges and towards them

"Well, what d'you think?" Bagman said, happily "Growing nicely, aren't they. Give them a month and Hagrid will have them twenty feet high. Oh don't worry," Bagman quickly said when he saw Harry and Cedric's faces, "You'll have your Quidditch pitch back to normal once the task is over. Now, I imagine that you can guess what we're making here?"

"Maze." Krum grunted.

"That's right," Bagman said, "A maze. The third task is really very straightforward. The Triwizard Cup will be placed in the centre of the maze. The first champion to touch it will receive full marks."

"We simply 'ave to get through ze maze?" Fleur asked suspiciously.

"There will be obstacles," Bagman said, "Hagrid and Professors Moody and Grubbly-Plank are providing some creatures...there will be some spells to overcome...all that sort of thing. Now, the champions who are leading will get a head start into the maze. Then the others will follow in order of points. However, you will all have a fighting chance depending on how well you do. Should be fun, eh?" Harry, who now had a pretty good idea just what the Skrewts were for, would have begged to disagree. Instead, however, he merely nodded politely.

"Very well," Bagman said, "If you haven't got any questions, let's get back to the castle."

Harry actually managed to get back in the castle without Bagman trying to offer his help again, though more because he walked very fast and Hermione was waiting for him.

"How did it go?" she asked, greeting him with a chaste kiss. They began walking through the halls.

"The third task is a maze with an obstacle course," Harry said, "The Triwizard Cup is at the centre of the maze. The winner is the one who gets to it first."

"I see," Hermione said, "I've been doing some research..."

"Big surprise," Harry chuckled and Hermione glared at him.

"As I was saying, I've been doing some research and I've found a spell that might come in handy. It's called the Four Point spell. It's very easy. All you have to do is place your wand flat on your hand and say 'Point me' and the wand will turn to face north."

"Like a compasss," Harry said.

"Exactly," Hermione said, "I'm looking at possibly modifying it to point towards the Tri-Wizard cup instead, but..."

"But, I think you've had enough work for today," Harry said and gave her another kiss before looking around for a broom closet.

Harry was going through his trunk looking for a book on his return to the dormitory when he made a horrifying discovery. The Philosopher's Stone was gone. But then he grinned.

Aeled trilled slightly on his perch in Harry's room. He was making splendid progress despite all the efforts of Dumbledore.

Voldemort is going to rise again soon. Aeled thought to himself, Very soon. He could feel it in the air; a sense of darkness that was growing stronger with each passing day. When that happens, Harry must become a Light Lord in fact as well as in name. To do that, he



will need, among other things, an army... he will help find the right people, even if his plan succeeds, there will still be the Death Eaters to contend with.

In a way, Harry was glad the Triwizard Champions were exempt from the end-of-term tests; it gave him more time to study hexes and ponder who might have stolen the Stone and how, although he could guess as to why. The day of the Third Task finally came; McGonagall walked up to Harry at breakfast.

"Mr. Potter," she said, "The champions are congregating in the chamber off the Hall after breakfast."

"But the Task isn't until tonight," Harry said, suddenly very worried that he had gotten the time wrong.

"True," McGonagall said and Harry breathed a sigh of relief, "But the Champion's families are invited to watch the final task."

"Oh, that's right" Harry said, smacking his forehead. He had completely forgotten about that. After he had finished eating, Harry went off with the other champions into the room. Sirius, Remus, and Tonks were all waiting for him and he greeted them enthusiastically. McGonagall looked at Sirius with dismay, hoping he would not play any Marauder style pranks while he was there and hoped that Fred and George Weasley would not find out he was a Marauder (although unknown to her, they already knew).

Cedric's parents, especially his father, were upset about Skeeter's Triwizard article as it had omitted Cedric entirely, although it wasn't Harry's fault.

"Didn't bother to correct her, though did you?" said Amos Diggory.

"Father!" Cedric said, "It's not his fault – Harry refused to talk to her so she made the whole thing up and besides haven't you been paying attention? Skeeter hasn't exactly been nice to Harry this whole time either."

"True," Amos Diggory reluctantly admitted. "I for one did not believe that ridiculous 'dark lord' article." Cedric's mother nodded in agreement and said; "Harry Potter a dark lord, what an absurd

thought, especially with that phoenix of yours. How did you find him again?"

"I didn't find him, he found me," Harry explained and relaxed slightly, "Cedric and I often spar in Professor Moody's duelling club. He's quite good, actually." Harry was sincere in this for most sixth years had difficulties with wand non-verbal magic but Cedric seemed to be a natural in the field, compared to Harry who had only just mastered the non-verbal levitation charm. Of course, wandless magic was a whole different story...

"Impressive," Amos Diggory said, brightening up considerably, "You know that's something you can tell your grandkids, Ced...You held your own in a duel with Harry Potter!" Cedric blushed considerably and looked at Harry who only shrugged. They both knew who was really the better duellist and that was all that mattered.

The stands were full with hundreds of students. The sky was a deep, clear blue now and the first stars were starting to appear. Professor Moody, Professor McGonagall and Snape walked onto the stadium and approached Dumbledore and the champions. They were wearing large, red, luminous stars on their hats. For some reason, Ludo Bagman was not there.

"We are going to be patrolling outside the maze," McGonagall said to the champions, "If you get into difficulty and want to be rescued, send red sparks into the air and one of us will come and get you, do you understand?" The champions nodded.

The patrollers walked away in different directions and then Dumbledore used the Sonorous charm on his throat.

"Earlier today, Professor Moody placed the Triwizard Cup deep within the maze. Only he knows its precise location. As Mr. Potter and Mr. Diggory are tied for first position, they will be the first to enter the maze, followed by Mr. Krum and Miss. Delacour." There was much cheering at this, "The first person to touch the cup will be the winner. Contentants, gather round, quickly." The quartet walked over to Dumbledore who held them in a huddle.

"In the maze, you'll find no dragons or creatures of the deep. Instead, you'll find something more challenging. You see, people change in

the maze. Oh, find the cup if you can. But be very wary; you could just lose yourselves along the way. Champions, prepare yourselves." A cannon fired and the Hogwarts marching band started. Harry and Cedric entered the maze via their respective entrances.. The hedges were so tall, they cast black shadows across the path and the crowd was also silent, making Harry suspect that some kind of Silencing charm had been placed on them. As he walked down the passage, the entrance sealed itself. He was now alone. He pulled out his wand and muttered, "Lumos."

He heard the canon again and sped up – Krum was now entering. His path was completely deserted. After a few minutes, the canon sounded again – that meant Fleur was now in the maze. The maze was growing darker by the minute and Harry had the distinct feeling that he was being watched, though he could see no one else. He reached a second fork

"Point me," he said, holding his wand flat in his palm. The wand spun around once and pointed to his right, toward a solid hedge. "Okay that's north, I need to go northwest...left fork and then right as soon as possible." He set off at a run again only to pause when he encountered one of Hagrid's Blast Ended Skrewts. It was now ten feet long and looked a bit like a giant scorpion. Its thick armour glinted in the light and Harry pointed his wand at it and said

"Stupefy!" the spell hit the skrewts armour and rebounded; Harry ducked and then burnt a hole in the maze wall. After getting through it, Harry quickly rolled around in the grass, putting out his burning robes and then continued. After several dead ends, Harry was forced to backtrack and use the Four-Point spell again. He set off on a new path and gasped when he saw a dead Hermione lying on the ground in front of him. This is just a boggart...this is just a boggart...He took a deep breath and summoned a memory playing in the snow with Hermione.

"Riddikulus!" he said and the boggart turned into a bunny. Harry continued on, coming up with more and more dead ends and having to back track again several times. He turned a corner and saw a golden mist in front of him. He started to go through the golden mist and the world turned upside down. He was hanging from the ground, threatening to fall into the sky. Harry took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and pulled a foot as hard as he could away from the ceiling. The world immediately righted itself and he fell to the ground. Harry

took another deep breath and ran forward through the maze. He came to another fork and took the right path. After several minutes, he turned to corner to see a forest troll in the distance. It began lumbering toward him, club raised. Harry sighed and raised his wand.

"Diffindo!" A red ray came out of his wand but it did little more than irritate troll. Harry fired some other spells but they also didn't have any effect. Then he remembered... "Wingardium Leviosa!" Harry desperately said. The trolls club flew out of its hand and smacked it on the head. The troll fell forward, unconscious. Harry continued on through the maze. He reached a fork and saw that the left was clear and the right had a flesh-eating slug that began moving toward him.

"Impedimenta!" Harry said and the Flesh-eating slug began immobile. Harry took the left path, ran for about five minutes, turned a corner and found himself face to face with Fluffy.

I knew I was forgetting something! Harry thought before starting to back up and saying "Glacio!" The Freezing charm, however, merely bounced off Fluffy's hide and the three-headed dog gnashed his teeth and charged. Harry continued to retreat, firing spells at random

"Stupefy, Impedimenta, Petrificus Totalus, Reducto, Diffindo!" None of the spells, however, had any effect and like with the troll, irritated Fluffy even more. Where's a flute when I need one? Just then, however, Aeled arrived, singing a sleepy song. Fluffy blinked and fell asleep. Harry let out a relieved sigh

"Thanks," he told the phoenix and continued through the maze. The moment he was out of danger, Aeled returned to Hermione's side. Harry turned left, right, left, right again and encountered a graphorn. Or more precisely, Cedric Diggory fighting a graphorn. Graphorn hide was even tougher than dragon hide, which also made it tougher than the basilisk armour Harry was currently wearing. It also repelled spells. The graphorn charged Cedric, seeking to gore him with its two, extremely sharp horns.

"Conjunctivitus!" Cedric yelled, aiming for the eyes. He, however, missed and the spell rebounded. Harry quickly cast his modified Bubble-Head charm and the graphorn collapsed, wheezing for air.

"Thanks," Cedric said.

"No problem," Harry replied and they split up again. He turned right, then left and strode down a long passage way to see a Sphinx.

"You are very near your goal," the Sphinx said, "But first, you must answer my riddle. Answer on the first guess and I will let you pass. Answer wrongly and I attack. Remain silent, and I will let you walk away unharmed." Harry nodded and said.

"Alright, let's hear the riddle." The sphinx settled down upon her hind legs in the very middle of the path and recited.

"First think of the person shut away from society,

He cannot think and is called insane most reliably,

Then think of the word used instead of 'and',

When you are wishing to offer an alternative,

And then tell me now; what creature do you never want to kiss?

Harry paced back and forth, thinking and repeating the riddle to himself. Finally, he snapped his fingers. Of course!

"It's a Dementor" he said "I'd never want to kiss a Dementor." The sphinx smiled and nodded,

"Quite correct," The sphinx moved aside and Harry continued. He came upon a fork and used the Four-Point spell. He took the left path and saw an Acromantula spider, one even bigger than Aragog. It was moving in on an unaware Cedric.

"Cedric, look out!" Harry shouted. Cedric whirled just as Harry shot a Reductor Curse against the spider. The spell merely bounced off the Acromantula and the spider charged him with surprising speed and attempted to pick Harry up with its pincers. Harry quickly cast a Disarming charm at the pincers. Simultaneously, Cedric yelled "Arania Exumai!" The spider was flung back against the hedge. It quickly got up and charged them again.

"Frumipo!" Harry and Cedric said in unison and the spider literally exploded, showering them with blood and guts. They saw in the distance the Triwizard Cup. There was a long stretch to go. The two

turned and looked as a wind blew down the passage, leaves blowing towards them. The two started to run towards the Triwizard Cup. They stayed head to head and reached the cup.

"Take it! You helped me!" Cedric said.

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. Cedric was walking away from the sort of glory that Hufflepuff house had never had in centuries.

"Go on," Cedric said. Harry suddenly had a vision of him and Cedric holding the cup up together in front of the student body.

"Together," Harry said and Cedric blinked, "It's still going to be a Hogwarts victory; we'll just tie for it." Cedric stared at Harry,

"Are you sure..."

"Yes," Harry said, impatiently, the leaves and wind still blowing, "On three, One...two...three!" He and Cedric both grasped a handle and instantly felt the jerking sensation of a portkey.

Please review, with thanks to those who do.

I decided to go against fan-fiction tradition and combine both the movie and book versions of the final task – I'll leave it up to you to find out what is what, but I think it works well. Where could Ludo Bagman be?

Please review, with thanks to everyone.

As usual, I don't own anything.

The last segment of the Goblet of Fire segment

## Chapter 23

The portkey deposited them in a graveyard. Harry did not bother trying to get up as he was in too much pain; instead he began looking around. On the hill some distance away was an old house. In front of them was a towering statue of the Grim Reaper complete with plaque. Harry saw a name engraved on it.

THOMAS RIDDLE

1915 - 1943

There were two other names engraved on the stone, both with the same date of death. Cedric was looking at the cup.

"Oh, no!" Harry said as he saw three cloaked figures approaching. One of them had a bundle in his arm; the other was levitating a stone cauldron.

"Cedric, get back to Hogwarts now!"

"Harry..."

"Do it!" Harry snarled, "Quickly and get Hermione to send Aeled!"

"I'm not leaving you behind..."

"Damnit, GO!" Harry felt a surge of power and Cedric went flying toward the cup; Harry's scar exploded in pain despite his Occlumency training and a high-cold voice called out:

"Kill the spare!" one of the figures raised a wand and began to say the words but Cedric, touched the cup gone before the incantation could be completed. Harry started to raise his own wand but a sharp blow from Nagini, who was slithering around in the grass, sent it flying and moments later he was immobilized in a Full Body-Bind. The pain from his scar was also keeping him from performing his wandless magic.

The portkey deposited Cedric in front of the maze and he immediately ran to Dumbledore.

"The Cup was a portkey to a graveyard," Cedric said, "There was this headstone with the name 'Tom Riddle'? Does that mean anything to you professor?" Dumbledore went pale.

"Yes it does," he said and Cedric then went over to Hermione, who was sitting next to Sirius. She merely nodded palely and said.

"As soon as I saw you return with out Harry, Aeled went to find him, but he said it will take some time due to the great evil at his location. I only hope he's not too late." Cedric then went to find Professor Moody.

The figure with the cauldron set it down at the base of the headstone and then flicked its wand. Harry was flung back against the headstone and the arm of the reaper statue moved, holding him against it. As the pain was starting to abate, Harry focused his mind to try and break the spell. For a moment it almost seemed like it would work and then he heard a familiar voice say

"Crucio!" Harry opened his eyes and would've screamed except for the fact that he was still partially in the Bind...and then it was over. He saw that the three figures were Lucius Malfoy, Bellatrix Lestrange and Ludo Bagman! While Bellatrix Lestrange and Ludo Bagman covered Harry with their wands, Lucius Malfoy dropped what looked like a child into the cauldron and then pointed his wand at Tom Riddle's grave. A bone levitated out of it and into the cauldron:

"Bone of the father, unknowingly taken, you will renew your son." Malfoy then took out a shining silver dagger and cut off his hand. It fell into the cauldron, which began hissing loudly; the elder Malfoy didn't even cry out in pain. "Flesh of the servant, willingly given, you will revive your master." Malfoy dried off the dagger and then went over to Harry intending cut up his arm. The knife had no effect against the disguised basilisk armour and Lucius Malfoy, after a pause to wonder what was going on, shrugged and cut Harry's cheek instead. He then dripped some drops of blood into the cauldron, which hissed again. "Blood of the enemy, forcibly taken, you will resurrect your foe." The cauldron hissed yet again though Harry could've sworn that he heard screams come from the cauldron.



Lucius Malfoy then dropped the Philosopher's Stone into the cauldron

"The Philosopher's Stone, secretly stolen, you will bring back the Dark Lord!" The cauldron steamed and simmered, sending sparks out everywhere.

"No, Alastor," Dumbledore said, "I simply cannot allow you to send more students into danger."

"We have an opportunity here..." Moody began. He wanted to take the duelling club with him to rescue Harry.

"I have made my decision!" Dumbledore said and Moody stalked away, his frown deepening.

A surge of white steam billowed out of the cauldron. Within the mist, Harry saw the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin; slowly rise from inside the cauldron.

"Robe me," the high, cold voice said. Lucius Malfoy clumsily picked up the black robes and pulled them over his master's head. The thin man stepped out of the cauldron and stared at Harry. Harry stared back, realizing the horror that had just occurred. Lord Voldemort had risen again. Voldemort looked at Lucius Malfoy, who handed him his wand.

"Hold out your arm," Voldemort said. Lucius Malfoy nodded and held out his bleeding stump. Voldemort lazily flicked his wand and a silver hand appeared to replace the one Malfoy had cut off.

"See now that I reward loyalty," Voldemort said, "Be sure you keep that in mind." Lucius Malfoy bowed deeply.

"Yes, master," he said, "Thank you master."

"Now, your other arm," Voldemort said and Malfoy held out the arm with the dark mark. "Let's see how many are as loyal as you three are...and how many will be stupid and stay away." With that, Voldemort pressed his finger onto the dark mark. Harry's scar seared in pain again and Lucius Malfoy bit his lip. When Voldemort removed his finger, Harry saw the mark was black again. Several minutes later, dozens of figures apparated into the graveyard. One

by one, the Death Eaters slowly moved forward, bowed, and kissed the hem of Voldemort's robes, murmuring "Master...master..." They then formed a silent circle, though there were some gaps in it, as if waiting for others. Voldemort, however, did not seem to be expecting any more.

"Welcome Death Eaters," Voldemort said after he had looked around at each of them "It has been far too long since we last met. Thirteen years if I recall correctly. I am pleased that you still answer the call, though admittedly a bit disappointed that you did not seek me out earlier. No matter, I suppose. You are all here now, that is what matters." The Death Eater's exchanged looks and whispers. Clearly, they were unused to being forgiven so readily and easily. Voldemort then began describing to his followers what had happened after he had been forced out of his body, everything from the forest in Albania, to Quirrel, to Bertha Jorkins. As he spoke, Harry again closed his eyes in an effort to throw off the spell.

"After Barty Crouch got himself captured," Voldemort continued "I had to find someone else to get Potter into the Tournament. I'm sure you all are aware of how Karkaroff thought he could get away with betraying me? Well, I taught him a lesson and he is now back in the fold, though he cannot come here because he is a judge in the Tournament. Another faithful servant of sorts also remains at Hogwarts and is unable to be here because it would jeopardize their...position. (Harry noted that Voldemort paid particular attention to one Death Eater after that part of his speech, although from his angle, he couldn't tell who it was, although the pieces were fitting together) It was thanks to them we were able to get the Philosopher's Stone. Bagman here, a new recruit, helped us by trying to fix the Triwizard to help Potter win, in the hope we would give him the money to clear his debts with the goblins. However, Potter was skilful enough to get through the tournament by himself, but Ludo helped when he could. A similar reason applies to my servants within the Ministry. The world will soon learn that I am back, but not yet. Not yet." Voldemort gestured to Harry "They call Potter here my downfall," Voldemort laughed, "I will admit that I made a miscalculation that night. I did not anticipate the old magic that his mother's sacrifice would invoke. But that protection no longer applies as Potter's blood is now in my veins!"

With that, Voldemort touched Harry, causing him unimaginable pain. Voldemort, however, felt pain of his own. Impossible! Voldemort

thought, trying desperately to understand what was going on. He did not know that Hermione's image had appeared in Harry's mind through their bond and her love filled him, numbing the pain to a degree. That love was also incidentally transmitted to Voldemort through his own mental link with Harry as they were currently both too weak to block it off with Occlumency. Voldemort jerked back and Harry finally succeeded in breaking the Body-Bind; he saw that Voldemort's fingers had been burned and that his skin seemed to be decaying a bit.

Voldemort's breathing also became more laboured for a few moments. The Death Eaters began murmuring at this, but Voldemort whirled and they quickly silenced. Voldemort turned back to Harry and said "Crucio!" Harry screamed in pain unlike he had ever experienced before. It felt like his bones were on fire, like his head was about to split in two, like a thousand red-hot needles were penetrating him. And then it ended. Voldemort flicked his wand and the ropes fell away. Harry fell to the ground and picked up his wand. He struggled up, trying to support his weight without causing his leg too much pain. The Death Eaters closed ranks, filling the gaps. Harry heard Aeled's voice in his head

"I'm on my way, hold on!"

"I presume you have been taught how to duel, Potter?" Voldemort asked in a slightly mocking tone.

"Of course," Harry said in the calmest, most aristocratic tone he could muster under the circumstances; "I am, after all, the Heir of Gryffindor as you are the Heir of Slytherin."

"Indeed," said Voldemort, "That, by the way, was why I chose you over the fool Longbottom."

"I'm honoured," said Harry sarcastically. He started to raise his wand and was expecting to be hit by a curse but Voldemort fell in pain.

"What is this?" Voldemort asked, "This was not supposed to happen."

"I suspected something like this would happen Tom," Harry said, "So I took precautions. The Philosopher's Stone that was stolen was a fake. With Dumbledore being the complete idiot that he is, I'm not

going to leave the real thing laying around. Before the third task, I took a potion which would temporary alter my blood, with tears donated by my phoenix. There was also a slow acting poison, the antidote to which is awaiting me at Hogwarts. This came from one of the Black Family books, so good luck in finding an antidote yourself. We know about your Horcruxes and will be destroying them."

"How do you know about them?" Voldemort asked. Harry didn't know anything but was working on guesswork. It would buy some time until Aeled could find him.

"I know a lot Tom. You collect relics from the Founders and as an Heir of Gryffindor; I can find them without trouble."

"You presume too much Potter. If you knew about them, then you would know three are in Hogwarts right now – Ravenclaw's precious Diadem, Slytherin's Staff of Power and Hufflepuff's diary. My spy would have reported their destruction if you knew. And even if you did destroy them, there are another four to deal with."

"There is an exception though – your own diary. I destroyed that thanks to Lucius Malfoy, who tried to use it just to discredit Arthur Weasley. Very interesting piece of magic there." Voldemort looked in anger at Malfoy, with a look that promised a long and very painful session with the Cruciatus curse when he regained some strength.

Harry could see Aeled as he flew over to him. The phoenix grabbed a hold of his arm.

"Thanks for that information Tom – give my regards to oblivion!"

The Death Eaters moved in toward Voldemort, shielding Harry from his gaze. The next thing Harry knew, he was back at Hogwarts.

"He's back!" Harry shouted as Aeled gently put him down next to Hermione, who instantly threw her arms around him, "He's back, Voldemort is back, but not for much longer!"

"What do you mean, he's back but not for long?" Fudge asked. He was meeting with Harry in a discreet location with Hermione and Sirius with him. When he returned, he refused to say a word to Dumbledore but asked to have a private word with Fudge, where Sirius had given him the antidote to the poison.

"It's simple Minister," Harry said, "Lucius Malfoy, Ludo Bagman and Bellatrix Lestrange along with a few other agents of Voldemort arranged for my name to be entered into the Goblet of Fire and arranged events so I would end up winning the Tournament. The Cup was a Portkey which took me to a graveyard where his Muggle relatives were buried."

Fudge looked shocked at that revelation.

"Yes, he's a half-blood. His father was a Muggle called Tom Riddle. However, after performing a rebirth ceremony, which made use of a fake Philosopher's Stone, my blood, his father's bone and Malfoy's hand, Voldemort was revived. But, after finding out the fake Philosopher's Stone had been stolen from my trunk, Hermione and I decided to take measures, concluding that Voldemort or his followers were going to try something."

"What did you do cub?" Sirius asked.

"We made a poison which would eat away at Voldemort if my blood was to be used. Before the third task, I drank it. Thanks to Alead and some clever work by Hermione, it was never a risk to me. We were right – as I said, Voldemort used my blood and is slowly being eaten away, so in six months time, he will be dead, but that is not enough."

"Why is that Mr. Potter?" Fudge asked.

"To keep himself alive, Voldemort created Horocruxes. I tricked him into revealing most of them – Ravenclaw's diadem, a diary belonging to Hufflepuff and Slytherin's staff of power. I suspect his snake is one and another was a diary, which is destroyed. Lucius tried to use it in order to discredit Arthur Weasley a few years ago but it got destroyed. If Voldemort dies without dealing with these, then our work will have been for nothing."

"What can we do?" asked Fudge.

"I ask that we keep this conversation between the four of us for now. I will tell my two other relations about this, maybe they can help." Harry said, "Including Lucius, Voldemort has many spies in the Ministry, if he gets wind that we're planning against him, he might

advance his plans and there would be worst done in six months than he did in eleven years. He might even hide the rest of his Horocruxes. Here's my idea – report in the Daily Prophet that you disbelieve what I've told you and that you are taking steps against me, including having me expelled from Hogwarts. That way, I'll have an unofficial freehand to deal with the other Horocruxes."

"What about Hagrid? Your helping a wanted man could work against you." Fudge suggested.

"Ah, Hagrid. He won the dragon's egg in a game of cards at the Hog's Head. He's always wanted dragons but there is no crime in that. Not wanting to harm the dragon, he hatched it and looked after it until he could make arrangements to go to a dragon reservation – there aren't any places here to send dragons."

"Very well – I'll have his name cleared at once." Fudge promised.

"Thank you. After we've dealt with the Horocruxes and when Voldemort dies, we can go public with this and you'll be a national hero for sure, your re-election will be certain." Fudge looked like the whole idea appealed to him.

"But for now, we need to unmask Voldemort's spies and I know who they are." Harry said, "Sirius, I need you to check up on a few things for me."

The group followed Harry into the Great Hall a few hours later, where Dumbledore was preparing to present the Triwizard Cup.

"Right!" Harry said, "Fancy knowing who arranged for my name to be entered into the Goblet of Fire?" The students looked at him with interest.

"It was Alastor Moody and Flora Dursley!" There were gasps all around. Flora and Moody were looking around.

"It was a good plan but there were a few fatal flaws. I met Moody before term began but this Moody forgot conversations, spells taught and the pop quiz he gave us. As for Flora, that was also a good plan, but there was one major problem with it. True, I don't know my mother's relatives as well as some people, including Dumbledore, think I should, but when I went with McGonagall, there

was no sign of the Dursley son and the Dursleys were on edge. Knowing how hateful they are of magic, I thought nothing of it until now. Then earlier today, I got that familiar feel. Flora Dursley is really the daughter of Bellatrix Lestrange!"

There were many gasps in the Great Hall at this revelation.

"How is that possible Potter?" Ron Weasley asked.

"I wondered that myself so I asked Sirius Black to question the Dursleys. Dumbledore raped Lestrange while in Azkaban Prison for unknown reasons and after she gave birth to his child, he took her to the Dursleys and used Compulsion plus memory charms on them. My guess that if all his other plans failed, he would use her and them as a plan to gain my family fortune. Sirius also found out that before McGonagall and I visited the Dursley residence, they were visited by Lucius & Narcissia Malfoy and Bellatrix who threatened to kill them if they didn't go ahead with their plans. It appears that Flora welcomed seeing her real mother, aunt and uncle and was willing to do anything for her, even if any of it was illegal. The Dursleys were cursed by the Imperious to say they didn't want her back and knew that as 'family', I wouldn't see her put on the streets."

Moody and Flora now knew the game was up and proceeded to make a break for it. Harry and Hermione took out their wands and stunned the pair.

"Harry," Dumbledore said, "What is the meaning of this?"

"Wait and see Professor, wait and see." Harry said. Ten minutes passed and nothing happened. Then, Moody began to change. He transformed into Marcus Flint – the Slytherin who had left Hogwarts two years before. Fudge summoned a couple of Aurors who took the prisoners away.

"Cornelius," Dumbledore said, "You should have let me question them. Many answers could have been provided as to why they were here and what light they can shed on what Mr. Potter said about the Dark Lord."

"Frankly Dumbledore," Fudge said, "I don't care what you think I should do. All I know is that there has been frequent misuse of Class B restricted potions taking place in your school! As for this talk of

You-Know-Who's revival, that's a load of dragon's dung! Mr. Potter – as Minister of Magic, I am declaring your victory of the Triwizard Tournament null and void. Mr. Cedric Diggory is the legitimate champion."

There was much cheering throughout the hall at this news. Some of the Muggleborns adapted a Muggle tune.

"Glory, Glory for Hufflepuff!" they sang.

Fudge got a moneybag out of his pocket and passed it to Cedric. He looked at Harry who gave him a discreet wink.

"Thank you Minister." Cedric said, "It's a honour to bring such glory to Hufflepuff."

There was nothing else from the Ministry until the end of term. Fudge and several Ministry lackies entered the Great Hall to make a few announcements.

"The Ministry has come to a few decisions regarding your education." Fudge said, "Educational Decree Number 26 - all current Hogwarts students with the exception of seventh year students will be required by law to attend Hogwarts. Educational Decree Number 27 – on the order of the Ministry of Magic, Harry James Potter is expelled from Hogwarts as of the end of this day. Educational Decree Number 28 – the so called Institute is now officially an illegal education establishment. Anyone caught attending from tomorrow will be expelled from Hogwarts."

Dumbledore stood up. "Minister, I must protest. The expulsion of students is a matter for the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress."

"It was Dumbledore, but looking at his actions over the last four years warrants expulsion. Mr. Potter will be permitted to keep his wand so he can find a placement at a new school, hopefully as far away from England as possible. If he returns to this school, then he will be arrested. You however, are being investigated for allowing the use of restricted potions in this school."

On the train later that day, Harry put up a privacy charm on the compartment.



"I'm surprised you're not protesting the expulsion." Hermione commented.

"I know I can't change the Ministry's plans. Anyhow, it's all part of my scheme with Fudge. Now I don't have to return to Hogwarts, then I have the time to find the rest of the Horocruxes."

"You mean WE." Hermione said.

"But you have to attend Hogwarts!" Harry said.

"Yes, but there are two months to go before the start of term. We can do what we can until then." Hermione suggested.

"I found and took the items Voldemort mentioned – just need to keep them hidden at the manor until we get the rest so we can destroy them in one go. Pity that poison will take all that time to deal with him – who knows what trouble he will cause."

"He won't be causing that much trouble," Hermione said, "The most he'll be able to do is cast Lumos. I added a magical inhibitor into the mixture which took effect hours after the revival. As it works, he won't be doing much. Everytime he tries to cast magic, especially unforgivables, it will reduce his life span."

"Well, from what I saw, he was all set to give Lucius Malfoy a major treat involving the Cruciatus curse for allowing his diary to be destroyed. I'd give good money to see that happening." Hermione was shocked at such a revelation but said nothing, privately agreeing with Harry.

Harry was right – as soon as Voldemort and the Death Eaters made it to their headquarters, he had subjected Lucius to a record session involving the Cruciatus curse (for at least half-an-hour) and would have killed him afterwards had he not required his influence with the Ministry. But the use of the curse had weakened him.

Ginny along with Fred and George Weasley came into the compartment not long later. Ever since Sirius took the girl in, there had been no incidents involving her.

"Draco, Neville and Ron have received the letters." Fred said.

"What letters?" Hermione asked.

"Oh, just a prank we had in mind for those three idiots." Harry said.

"What letters?" Hermione asked again, glaring. Before anyone could say anything, two boys shouting could be heard.

"WHAT!" the three shouted at the same time,

"THERE IS NO WAY IN HELL I'M MARRYING THAT BLOOD TRAITOR OR DUMBLEDORE'S SQUIB!" Draco shouted.

"I'M NOT MARRYING THAT SLYTHERIN PONCE OR THAT BLOODY SQUIB!" Ron shouted.

"I CAN'T MARRY THOSE TWO!" Neville shouted.

"It was about time someone put those three in their places," Fred said.

"So, we got hold of copies of Dad's signature, along with Lucius Malfoy and Dumbledore's, being Neville's guardian, and forged a marriage arrangement between those three." George added.

"And I paid the Gringotts goblins to back-date it. There's no getting out of it, even if Lucius Malfoy uses every Knut he has in bribery money." Harry finished.

Hermione was unsure what to say.

"Albus – the Dark Lord has ordered me to find an antidote to the poison he was given by Potter's blood. Do you want me to find an antidote or should we let it run its course?"

Dumbledore considered things for a minute. Potter has got both the most intelligent witch of his generation plus the entire Black and Potter libraries on his side.

"Do what you can Severus, but don't go out of your way. It is possible that a combination of poisons were used but if the Dark Lord dies, he dies. It means I may have to accelerate my plans."

He needed a place for the Order of the Phoenix to meet in secret. There was no chance of using a Potter or Black property, he had sold all but one of his properties to help fund the Order in the previous war. He started to wonder what Sirius Black would do or say if he invited him to rejoin the order.

Please review, with thanks to everyone to reviewed or betaed this story.

As usual, I don't own anything.

I apologize for the delay with this chapter, it took a good while to figure out how to do it. I also apologise for the length of it, I didn't want to add stuff just for the sake of it.

With thanks to alix32 for her continued beta work.

To those who noticed that the chapter was reuploaded, I did so to correct the bold and italics inserted at random by Word.

## Chapter 24

"CRUCIO!" Voldemort shouted, casting the torture curse on Lucius Malfoy, "You keep failing me Lucius. If it wouldn't kill me doing so, I would kill you now." He held the curse on Malfoy for five minutes before releasing it, before falling back weakened. Snape gave him a potion to boost his energy.

"What have you to report Severus?" Voldemort asked.

"Nothing much my Lord," Snape said, "I have given a sample of your blood with the poison to an old pre-Hogwarts Muggle friend of mine, who is one of their top genetic scientists. If she can't find an antidote, no-one will."

"How dare you approach Muggles with this Severus!" Voldemort shouted.

"I know everyone's feelings about this my Lord," Snape said, "But the circumstances warrant it. I have read the potions books of all the families here, including those belonging to the old fool. The poison is likely listed in the books of the Potters or the Blacks, or knowing that Mudblood Granger, it might be one of her own invention. She and Potter are too well protected under Fidelius and/or ancient wards of the Potter homes so an abduction attempt is out of the question."

"My Lord," Lucius Malfoy said, "I tried to convince that idiot Fudge to order the potions books of the Potters and Blacks to be confiscated but he refuses to do so without a good reason and I have not been able to pay him enough to pass the order." He was spared the cruciatus this time because this was the reason Voldemort had tortured him this time.

"Very well Severus," Voldemort said, "I will allow the use of Muggles this one time but don't do it again without asking me. Now, we will make plans to break our followers out of Azkaban. In the event we fail to stop Potter's poison, I want us to cause as much death and destruction as we can before I die."

Lucius was lucky Voldemort was not torturing him over Draco's contract with Ron Weasley and Neville Longbottom. Voldemort was thinking of the intelligence on Dumbledore that Draco could get for him so was allowing the marriage to go ahead.

### THREE PUREBLOOD FAMILIES TO UNITE

It has been announced today that three Pureblood families are to unite via marriage. It was discovered that a marriage contract between Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom and Draco Malfoy was made in 1982 and signed by Arthur Weasley, Albus Dumbledore and Lucius Malfoy.

All parties are claiming that the contract is a fake but our sources at the Ministry says it is perfectly legal. Unless one of them dies, there is no getting out of it. The Ministry has set a date of August 1st for the wedding, being two days after Neville Longbottom's 15th birthday. According to the law, if one party does not turn up, then their family will be fined a large sum of money.

Marriages of this kind have not been made since 1788 and the staff of the Daily Prophet wish the lucky trio well.

"Sirius, how good to see you again." Dumbledore said. Sirius Black was standing in his office.

"I am not sending Harry to the Dursleys. I told you this four years ago and I am reminding you of it now. As an official protectorate of the goblin nation, they won't stand for it if he is sent there." Sirius said.

"I am not going to ask you to send him there," Dumbledore said, "I am reactivating the Order of the Phoenix in order to fight Voldemort and I would like you to rejoin, despite our differences."

"After everything you've tried to do to Harry to bend him to your will, why should I rejoin the Order?"

"I only wanted to train him to fight Voldemort." Dumbledore said.

"Then have him sent to prison for murder afterwards, then if he married Ginny Weasley before then, she would get everything owned by the Potters, of which she would give you a share." Sirius said.

Dumbledore was silent after Sirius' speech.

"I'm leading my own movement against Voldemort." Sirius said, "We will work with your Order, provided you do not make any movement against Harry."

"Very well Sirius," Dumbledore said, vowing an oath not to take any form of action against Harry while Voldemort was on the loose, including not sending him to the Dursleys. He also made Dumbledore take an oath to leave Ginny alone and not try to force her back to the Weasley family.

"How do we start looking for the remaining Horocru克斯?" Hermione asked. She and Harry were at her house, specifically in her bedroom.

"We need to know what else he would have used. From what I know of him, he would have used whatever relics of the Founders he could find." Harry said.

"I've been looking into that." Hermione said, "According to Hogwarts – A History, Slytherin had a staff, a ring and a locket – the staff has been destroyed. You have all the Gryffindor relics. Only Ravenclaw's diadem survives to this day and you've already got and destroyed that. A cup belonging to Hufflepuff was reported stolen from an heir of hers about forty years ago. I discovered that before her death, a Tom Riddle visited her with the intent of buying some items for Borgin and Burkes. The Hufflepuff diary has already been destroyed."

"So, assuming he would have used those three items, the problem would be finding them." Harry said, "I don't think he would have hidden anything at Riddle Manor – Dumbledore must have thought of that. What if his magical relatives came from the same area?"

"That's a idea." Hermione said, "According to the book, the last known Slytherin relatives were the Gaunts but the last Gaunt to attend Hogwarts was Morvin Gaunt, who left in 1918. Voldemort, of course went under the name Riddle."

"So, if we can find out where they lived, we could find something in their old house. But how do we find out where it is? We can't exactly walk into the Ministry and ask – it might tip Voldemort off."

"There might be something in the library at Potter Manor." Harry said, "as the Heirs to Gryffindor, they might have something on Slytherin's heirs."

"We had better hurry – we only have a few months, if not less if Voldemort uses unforgivables." Hermione said.

Fudge hid a smirk as he looked at Dumbledore, sitting nearby in one of the courtrooms at the Ministry. This whole thing is what I need to remove Dumbledore from his offices of power.

"All in favour of removing Albus Dumbledore as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot?" Fudge asked.

Everyone raised their hands. "So be it. Albus Dumbledore, you are hereby removed as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot."

"I must protest," Dumbledore said, "With the Wizengamot in disarray, Lord Voldemort will take advantage and take over."

"He cannot take over Dumbledore," Fudge said, "Because as you know, he is dead. Now, if you persist in this rumour and scaremongering, I'll personally sign the papers to send you to Azkaban."

"I have no intention of going to Azkaban Cornelius," Dumbledore said, "I can break out easily, but I have much better things to do with my time."

"Before you go Dumbledore, there are some educational decrees being passed in the next couple of days, so inform the staff that there will be major changes."

Someone else stepped up.

"I've examined that marriage contract – it has both your signature and magical signature on it, so Neville has to marry Ron Weasley and Draco Malfoy."

Ron Weasley was fuming. He had just been informed by Professor McGonagall that his grades were that lousy, he was going to have to repeat the fourth year. That was all he needed, the Ministry had told his family that the marriage contract, despite Arthur Weasley being cleared via Veritaserum, was legal, having both his signature and magical signature on.

Now, with the threat of a very heavy fine which the Weasley family could not afford to pay (without selling Ginny into a marriage, of which they could not do, Ginny having been adopted by Sirius Black), the Weasley family were preparing for the marriage. Molly Weasley was teaching him a few charms to keep the other two away from him during times in bed, although they had to have sex on the wedding night under penalty of heavy fines.

Please review, with thanks to those who do



As usual, I don't own anything

## Chapter Twenty-Five

"I've found it!" Hermione said. She had been looking in a book entitled Heirs of the Founders, "It says that the Gaunt family lived in Little Hangton." She then started looking through rolls of parchment with their research notes. "Tom Riddle's family came from the rich part of town." The two were in the library at Grimmauld Place, having come over from Hermione's house via an illegal Floo connection.

"Not surprising, considering the size of the house. But with that money, the Riddles could have hired someone to keep it spick and span." Harry said.

"Not according to this," Hermione said, "The Riddles were found dead in 1944. The prime suspect was their gardener Frank Bryce who was cleared of all charges. He was reported to have been discharged from the army during World War Two due to an injury. The Riddle's cook told the public that Mr. Bryce went a bit loopy during the war and for years, everyone believed in his guilt. The house is now owned by some rich person who keeps it for taxation purposes, I don't know why. My father is the best person to ask about things like that, we have a house in Devon which we inherited from my great-grandfather. Dad says we keep it for tax reasons. However, Frank Bryce vanished last summer." She showed a newspaper clipping which had a picture of Frank Bryce.

"That's the old man from the dream." Harry said.

"That means we're getting somewhere. How do we get to Little Hangton?" asked Hermione.

"We use the Knight Bus, now." Harry said. They went to leave the room when Harry stopped. He could see a locket in a cabinet.

"That matches Slytherin's locket as shown in the book." As he reached to take it, he felt a pull.

"I think that is a Horcrux." Harry said. They took it and put it in Hermione's handbag. There was an Order meeting coming up and they wanted to make sure everyone was in before they left. It was

reported that Ron Weasley would be coming, his mother not trusting him at their home alone.

"I call this meeting of the Order of the Phoenix to order." Dumbledore said. They were in the kitchen of 12 Grimmauld Place. Sirius, Remus and Tonks were standing to one side while other people were sitting or standing in some places. Sirius had offered the use of the house for meetings, the security being second to none. But besides him, Tonks, Remus, Harry, Hermione and Ginny, everyone else was restricted to the kitchen. Harry had recommended that Sirius, Remus and Tonks join, as there could be incriminating evidence to use against Dumbledore.

"Are we still going to send the Potter boy to those Muggles?" the real Alastor Moody asked.

"No," Dumbledore said, "He is safe where he is. Sirius has assured me that their home has the best wards money can buy."

"Where is he right now?" Molly Weasley asked. No-one said anything. "He should be brought here during meetings so we know where he is when Black is not at home."

"Harry can look after himself Mrs. Weasley." Sirius said. He knew that Harry was spending time at Hermione's home.

"Severus – what has Voldemort got planned?" Dumbledore asked.

"He's still weak thanks to the poison Potter gave him. Subjecting Lucius Malfoy to a lengthy session with the Cruciatus curse didn't do him any favours. I theorise that every time he casts an unforgivable, it seriously drains his life force. I estimate that if he doesn't cast anymore unforgivables, he will live for three months."

"What else have you learnt?" Dumbledore asked.

"He plans to break his followers out of Azkaban within a month." Snape said.

"Why are you allowing this so called marriage between Ronald Weasley, Neville Longbottom and Draco Malfoy to go ahead, considering the papers are fake?" someone asked.

"This will be a good source of intelligence." Dumbledore said, "Messrs. Weasley and Longbottom will be in frequent contact with Lucius Malfoy at his manor and so the potential for intelligence gathering is great."

"But what if they get caught? They'll be killed within minutes." Someone asked.

"For the greater good, what we can learn from them outweighs any risk." Dumbledore said, "I will issue them with Portkeys which will take them to safety in case of emergencies." He turned to Sirius, "I must ask you to seriously limit Harry's movements outside the house. The Death Eaters might attempt an abduction."

"I am not going to keep Harry a prisoner Dumbledore," Sirius said, "He can look after himself. Now he is no longer a student of Hogwarts, he is no longer your responsibility."

"As for Fudge, I think he is in league with Harry," Dumbledore said, "After Voldemort is dealt with, I think we should consider replacing Fudge and his staff with people of our own choice."

Harry and Hermione got off the Knight Bus on a long country lane. The two walked down the path towards an old shack. There was an old woman approaching them – they stopped.

"What do you know about that building over there?" Harry asked.

"That place? That used to belong to an old tramp called Marvolo Gaunt and his two children. The son was mad – he would hang dead snakes from the front door. I heard both men got sent to some prison and the daughter married Tom Riddle." The woman said.

"What happened to them?" asked Hermione.

"He left her and went back to the Manor where he and his parents were murdered. Some people think Frank Bryce killed them, but I believe he was innocent."

"How come everyone thinks he did it?"

"He claimed that that a teenage boy who looked like Tom was skulking about the grounds before, but everyone disbelieved him, we knew Tom Riddle never had children. I thought it was possible Merope Gaunt was pregnant before Tom left her for some strange reason. Anyhow, I have to go and do my errands."

The old woman walked away and Harry and Hermione walked to the old shack. It wasn't very big and it looked like it had been rotting away for years. The two took out their wands and opened the door.

"Looks like Muggle repelling wards here." Harry said. The two walked into what could be described as a kitchen. They looked around.

"There's a ring under this table." Hermione said. She picked it up and showed it to Harry.

"That matches the ring as shown in the book." Harry said, "Let's get out of here before we trigger any traps or alert Voldemort to our presence here."

The two got out of the house and summoned the Knight Bus.

"So how do we destroy it?" Harry asked. Hermione was looking at a book.

"We can either use basilisk venom or extreme fire." She answered.

The two took it to one of the large empty rooms of Potter Manor and put it in the middle of the room. Harry also put down the other three Horcruxes he'd found at Hogwarts. They then went to the door and pointed their wands at them.

"Fiendfyre!" the two said. Fire shot from their wands, threatening to go out of control. A scream could be heard from the relics. Harry and Hermione got out of the room and closed the door as the fire raged. It died down minutes later.

The couple's next stop was Gringotts. They figured that Voldemort might have asked one of his Death Eaters to look after a Horcrux in their vaults. Harry went to a teller and asked for Lord Ragnok, the chieftain of the bank. His request was granted.

"Good afternoon Mr. Potter," Lord Ragnok said, "and who is this charming young lady?"

"Good afternoon my Lord Ragnok," Harry said, "My betroth mate, Hermione Granger."

"My greetings Miss. Granger, I can tell that Mr. Potter has done well in his choice of mates." He clicked his fingers and a goblin came back with refreshments.

"Now then, what can Gringotts do for you today?" he asked. Harry explained about the Horcruxes and what he had learnt from Voldemort himself.

"WHAT?" Ragnok shouted, "That piece of scum had his followers store Horcruxes in my bank? The treaty between the goblins and the humans prohibits such things from being stored here!"

He called for several of his best goblins. "You are to go down to Tom Riddle's vault along with the vaults of everyone on the Death Eater list, especially that of those known to have bribed their way out of prison with the Imperious curse excuse. You are to check for Horcruxes and bring them to my office. The vault of those found to have Voldemort's soul fragments hidden inside will be confiscated!" He was mad. As soon as the goblins left, he turned back to the couple.

"My congratulations on finding and destroying a Horcrux. It is not easy for wizards to do. If there is any Horcruxes here, then my goblins will find them." Ragnok said.

"My thanks to you my Lord," Harry said. The trio enjoyed their refreshments and Lord Ragnok explained some goblin history to Hermione. It turned out that most of what Binns taught in History of Magic was wrong. Harry vowed that after Voldemort was dealt with and he was back at Hogwarts, he would use his status as the Heir of Gryffindor and by conquest, the Heir of Slytherin to sack not only Binns but also Snape and Dumbledore. Two hours later, three goblins came back with a single bag.

"My Lord Ragnok," one goblin said, "We found this in the Lestrage vault!" He took Hufflepuff's cup out of the bag and put it on the table.

"You have done well. Order Griphook to seize the contents the Lestrangle vault and send the customary letter to Bellatrix Lestrangle that her vault now belongs to us." Ragnok said.

"When we catch up with Voldemort, he will suffer for what he's done." Ragnok continued.

"He's suffering enough as it is," Hermione said and explained what they had done.

"Very cunning of you." Ragnok commended.

Hermione passed over the locket from her bag. Ragnok confirmed it was a Horcrux.

"Shall we destroy these?" he asked.

He took the items and led the couple to a special room. "Humans aren't normally allowed to enter this room. It is because Mr. Potter is an official protectorate of the Goblin nation that the two of you can enter." He put the cup and locket on a special table. He also took a piece of skin out of a pocket and also put it on the table. Harry noticed it bore the Dark Mark.

"One of his Death Eaters came in two weeks ago and tried to threaten us with obliteration if we didn't comply with Voldemort's wishes and turn over non-Death Eater vaults to them. We killed him and took the skin with his mark for research. There is a way we could use this against him, we can tell it is powered by his magic, which allows the Death Eaters to come to where he is when a mark is activated."

"Can it be taken while under the Imperious curse?" Harry asked.

"No, it has to be taken willing." Ragnok said, "Now, let's move aside."

The trio moved to the side of the room and goblin magic took over. Lightning struck the cup and the Dark Mark. Both started to scream.

"CRUCIO!" Voldemort shouted. He was torturing Bellatrix Lestrange, she has just received the Howler that told her that due to her storing a Horcrux in Gringotts, her vaults were being confiscated. She screamed in pain until Voldemort released the curse. He fell down seriously weakened.

Suddenly, all the Death Eaters fell to the ground clutching their arms. The Dark Mark imploded, taking the wrists and left hands of the Death Eaters with it.

At the Order meeting, Snape clutched his hand and fell to the ground as his Dark Mark imploded along with his wrist and his hand. Everyone looked on in horror.

At Azkaban Prison, Death Eaters bearing the mark clutched their arms as their marks imploded. However, due to lack of food to keep their systems going, they fell to the ground dead.

"Now Mr. Potter, do you want to do the honours? Any curse will do." Lord Ragnok suggested.

Harry took out his wand and fired a powerful curse at the table. The cup and locket exploded sending bits and pieces everywhere.

Voldemort withered about in pain as the power feedback attacked his insides. Now his Dark Marks were destroyed, he had no magical reserves to draw back on, as he died, he regretted using the Cruciatus on Bellatrix. If he hadn't done that then he might have had some power to help himself with. Curse Potter! Curse that Mudblood! Then he fell to the ground dead.

Please review, with thanks to my betas

Now Voldemort has been dealt with, don't think this is the end of The Story of Harry Potter-Black, there are other things to deal with, including Dumbledore.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

"This is Diane Carey of the Wizarding Wireless News. I am standing outside a house called Riddle Manor where Minister Fudge is holding a press conference." A reporter said on the radio.

Outside Riddle Manor, Fudge was standing outside the front door with Harry and Hermione next to him. Photographers were taking photos as Aurors escorted Death Eaters from the house – there were stunned looks as people like Lucius Malfoy were escorted from the premises before being taken to Ministry holding cells.

A person came into the Order meeting where Molly Weasley was tending to Snape's wounds.

"Fudge is holding a press conference over the vanquishing of You-Know-Who!" he said.

Sirius got a wireless out and turned it on. Fudge's voice could be heard.

"You-Know-Who was one of the most dangerous wizards of our time and we breathed a sigh of relief when he was vanquished by Harry Potter nearly fourteen years ago," Fudge was saying, "We were safe from him and his followers, or so we thought."

"What happened Minister?" one reporter asked.

"He had arranged for agents of his to be planted in Hogwarts under Polyjuice Potion, where they entered Mr. Potter into the Triwizard Tournament, knowing he would have to participate. During the final event, one of these agents turned the Triwizard Cup into a Portkey, by which Mr. Potter was taken to a graveyard where his blood was forcefully used in a ritual to bring You-Know-Who to life." Fudge answered.

"You've been denying the return of You-Know-Who, Minister, since Dumbledore made the announcements. What's changed?" a second reporter asked.

"Mr. Potter and his advisors took me into their confidence after the ritual took place and we agreed to put on a show in which I refused to believe it. That way, it would give He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named



and his Death Eaters a false sense of security. Expelling Mr. Potter from Hogwarts was also for show so he could take an unofficial hand in dealing with the methods used by You-Know-Who to come back to life."

"What are these methods?" The first reporter asked.

Fudge allowed Harry to take the stand. "Voldemort (many gasps at the name being mentioned), created Horcruxes, considered to be the darkest of magic ever, worse than the killing curse! For those of you who do not know what they are, you commit murder to split your soul into items which anchor it – as long as one of these survive, you can never die! (lots of gasps) Voldemort (even more gasps) created SIX of them and thanks to Minister Fudge for allowing me an unofficial hand in dealing with them, and to my betrothed Hermione Granger, I was able to find them and deal with them."

"What items were used and how did you get rid of them? Another reporter asked.

"The first one was a diary, created in this very building when Voldemort, then known as Tom Riddle, a half-blood, murdered his father and grandparents. He entrusted it to Lucius Malfoy, who slipped it into the cauldron of Ginny Black, formerly Weasley, knowing it would enable her to open the Chamber of Secrets, just in order to discredit Arthur Weasley."

"Mr. Malfoy claimed to have been under the Imperious curse - did you witness any such curse being used on anyone?" a reporter asked.

"No - the only unforgivables to be used was the Cruciatus on myself and two attempts using the killing curse." Harry answered.

"I've heard enough." Dumbledore said and after selecting a couple of Aurors he could trust, left the room.

"Thanks to Voldemort's big mouth during our duel in the graveyard, I learnt that a couple of Horcruxes were stored in Hogwarts itself. There is a little known room at the school called the Come and Go Room otherwise known as the Room of Requirement. Voldemort hid these in this room. As an heir of Godric Gryffindor, I was able to secure access to the room and gain Ravenclaw's Diadem,

Slytherin's Staff of Power and a diary belonging to Hufflepuff. Nothing to do with the other diary I just mentioned."

Harry then told the story of how he and Hermione researched and found out about the other Horcruxes.

"So now, with the destruction of the Horcruxes, Voldemort was rendered mortal and is now unable to come back to life." Harry finished.

"That's all I needed to hear." A voice could be heard. Everyone turned and saw Dumbledore with two Aurors. "Harry James Potter, you are under arrest for the murder of Tom Marvolo Riddle, otherwise known as Lord Voldemort."

"As it happens, I didn't kill him. As I said, the goblins found one of the Horcruxes in the Lestrage vault in Gringotts and used a special ritual to destroy them and Voldemort at the same time. They told me his death was helped by the poison he ended up with by using my blood and the fact he kept draining his magical core by torturing his followers for incompetence. So, my hands are clean." Harry said.

"As Minister of Magic, I can confirm that Harry James Potter and Hermione Jean Granger will not face any charges over the death of You-Know-Who." Fudge said. There were cheers at this announcement.

"What will happen to the arrested Death Eaters?" a reporter asked.

"They will face trial but any claims of being under the Imperius curse will be investigated. Corruption will not be an issue in these trials. I have discovered that my predecessor was heavily bribed by Lucius Malfoy and other Death Eaters to escape jail." Fudge said, "I am also announcing a high level investigation against Albus Dumbledore over the fact Polyjuice and Love Potions were brewed in Hogwarts and used. It also concerns me that he tried to use Amelia Bones' niece in a ritual to bind Mr. Potter to her so Dumbledore could control his every move. She will not be facing charges, as there is evidence that she was forced into the ritual by use of the Imperious curse and as soon as it can be proved that Dumbledore cast it, he will be in Azkaban."

Dumbledore realised he was beaten and apparated away before anyone could arrest him. Harry whispered something to Fudge who then gave an order to a couple of Aurors.

Dumbledore arrived back at 12 Grimmauld Place to find a couple of Aurors arresting Snape.

"What is the meaning of this?" Dumbledore asked.

"Arresting this scum Death Eater!" one of the Aurors said, "You will let us take him otherwise you'll be arrested for obstructing justice."

Everyone else sat where they were as the Aurors took Snape away.

"Don't worry Severus, I'll have this all cleared up then will have you released." Dumbledore promised.

"No." Fudge said, "We have widespread evidence that Severus Snape willingly participated in Death Eater activity, so he will await trial like the other Death Eaters."

"But," Dumbledore said, "At least release him on bail so he can prepare notes in the event I have to hire a new Potions master."

"Request denied. As he is in a Ministry cell, he can either dictate such notes to you in the presence of an Auror or he can do it himself in the cells."

"I'll help him with it." Dumbledore said and turned to leave.

"Your wand first Dumbledore." Fudge said, not willing to take any chances. Dumbledore reached into his robes and took out his wand and put it on Fudge's desk. Fudge didn't know however, that Dumbledore gave him a fake.

Dumbledore walked into the cell area to see two Aurors standing guard. He could see Snape's cell and used wandless magic to stun the guards. He then walked over to Snape's cell and unlocked the door.

"I take it you weren't successful in securing my release then Albus?" Snape asked.

"No," Dumbledore said, not realising who was listening in, "So I'm getting you out anyway. First things first, we need to send Potter's Mudblood and her family to Azkaban. We will then tell Potter that they will be released if he agrees to be sentenced to death for murdering Voldemort and turn over the contents of his vaults over to me. Then, when he is in Azkaban, we will have all of them kissed!"

Using glamour charms, Dumbledore made himself and Snape look like ordinary Ministry officials so they could get out of the building without raising suspicion.

The following morning, Harry, Sirius, Remus, Tonks and Ginny were having breakfast. Hermione had joined them, she and Harry had plans for the day. An owl could be heard and it flew in and dropped a letter in front of her. She reached for it but Tonks stopped her.

"That's a Portkey!" she said.

"How do you know?" Hermione asked.

"Aurors are trained to be able to detect unauthorised Portkeys," she scanned it with her wand, "it's got Dumbledore's signature all over it and it would have taken you to Azkaban."

She conjured a box and levitated the Portkey into it. "So we'll have evidence of Dumbledore's crimes."

The floo activated and Kingsley Shacklebolt came out.

"Dumbledore's broken Snape out of the Ministry cells." He said too many gasps. "He's been trying to convince Amelia Bones to have you arrested for the death of Voldemort." Kingsley was not afraid to say the name either. "It's only a matter of time before they are caught. Because Snape escaped from Ministry custody, if he is recaptured, then it's straight to Azkaban to await trial for him. Miss. Granger - we're going to arrange a protection detail for your parents incase Dumbledore and Snape try to retaliate using them."

Fudge and the Hogwarts Governors were in a meeting with Professor McGonagall.

"In light of Dumbledore's crimes, we have decided to remove him as Headmaster of Hogwarts and we would like you to take his place." The lead governor said.

"Very well," McGonagall said, "What is the official position involving Harry Potter?"

"He is free to re-attend Hogwarts." Fudge said, "His expulsion was just for show."

"Good – that means the Prefect problem has been solved. Besides Mr. Potter, no-one else in Gryffindor House is suitable, although Dumbledore tried to convince me that Ronald Weasley would make a good Prefect. Miss. Granger will be the other Gryffindor Fifth Year Prefect."

"They've earned it," Fudge said, "I understand there are problems filling in the Defence teaching post?"

"Albus would always claim it was jinxed and no-one would take the job, but now that hirings are under my control, I'm sure I can hire someone. I just need to send an owl or two first. I know I'm going to sack Sybil Trowlany and authorise the exorcism of Binns."

There was a meeting at the Potter home that same day.

"Ginny - remember I told you that if there wasn't anymore trouble involving you by Christmas, I would adopt you?" Sirius asked and Ginny nodded.

"You've made a good recovery from the curses placed on you and you have proved beyond a doubt that you didn't do the things you did willingly, so I am filing the adoption papers today."

Ginny flung herself upon Sirius and thanked him.

"When it is official, you will officially be my Heir and when I die, you can call yourself Lady Black. You do have two choices though - when it is official, you can go through a blood adoption so you'll look like me or you can stay the way you are."

Ginny had no idea what to say. "You don't have to decide now."

Dumbledore and Snape stood in the line for the Muggle Eurostar. They were planning on leaving the country and decided that Muggle transportation was the best way to escape. They didn't notice the WANTED posters with their names and photographs on.

Someone noticed the posters and recognised the faces as two people in the line. She reported the matter to security who charged into the room, pointing their guns at Dumbledore and Snape.

"Put your hands in the air and do not move!" one of the officers said.

The two wizards got their wands out and cast a series of dark curses.

Please review, with thanks to those who do.

As usual, I don't own a thing.

Coming up to the last few chapters of this story. It's been a thrill working on this one. I've got a poll on my profile regarding a rewrite of The Traitors, so please vote. Based on some comments made by my beta, I've decided to add a few bits to this chapter.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

The Daily Prophet had to stop the presses because of news they had received at the very last minute.

### DUMBLEDORE AND SNAPE MURDER MUGGLES

#### ON THE RUN IN EUROPE

It was only just revealed to us that former Hogwarts Headmaster Albus Dumbledore and Potions Master Severus Snape murdered twenty Muggles at a transport terminal before disappearing.

As you all know, Dumbledore and Snape wanted for a variety of crimes including Death Eater activity. Dumbledore is also wanted for breaking Snape out of a Ministry jail.

The two decided to flee England via Muggle transportation. However, Ministry Wanted posters were in the Muggle world too and it appeared that the two were recognised from such a poster. Security came by to arrest them but from survivor reports, they got out their wands and cast multiple killing curses. One security officer was able to use his gun (a Muggle version of a wand) to wound Dumbledore before both wizards disappeared.

The Ministry is offering a 30,000 galleon reward for any information which leads to the capture of Dumbledore and Snape – dead or alive.

Most of the British Wizarding world was in fear following the news report, but most distracted themselves by awaiting the marriage of Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom and Draco Malfoy. It was pointed out to them that with the attention being paid to it, it meant no-one was paying attention to Harry Potter. Ron relished the attention.

Harry on the other hand, welcomed the lack of attention. Despite the wedding being a hive of the wizarding world's A-list, those witches and wizards keen to be seen at a major historical event, certain people had not received an invitation. Harry and Hermione were two such people who didn't get invited. Fred and George Weasley also didn't get invited – they didn't care. Sirius, Remus, Tonks and her parents also didn't receive invitations. None of them cared that they didn't get an invite. Ginny did get an invite but she wrote back saying she was not going.

Hermione said to Harry: "When we get married, we know who to and who not to invite."

"All I want when I marry you," Harry said, "Is very close friends and family." She knew he meant Sirius, Remus, Tonks, her family, Ginny and by extension, the Weasley twins.

"There is something that needs to be done today," Sirius said to the collected hoards at Number 12, "Today is the day that Ginny officially becomes part of the Black family and my heir. She has decided to be blood adopted by myself." He got out a potion which he had brought in Diagon Alley.

He and Ginny pricked their fingers, allowing a drop of blood to go into the vial. Ginny then drank it. Screaming in pain, her looks changed slightly to give her a bit of Sirius' appearance, although her red hair remained.

"Now to show you something." He said, leading the group into the drawing room where there was the Black family tapestry, which Harry had seen hundreds of times. They could see that Sirius' name was back on along with Andromeda Tonks, her husband and Tonks. Underneath Sirius' name, there were the words: GINNY ANDROMEDA with a year of birth saying 1981. Ginny noted that Harry's name was nowhere to be seen.

"How come Harry's name isn't on here?" she asked.

"I never found out why." Sirius said, "I guess it's because I blood adopted you but not Harry."

Dumbledore and Snape were not having an easy time. After disappearing from Dover, they went all over Europe, breaking into



empty houses to eat and rest before leaving. It seemed that wherever they went, there were WANTED posters offering a reward for their capture – dead or alive.

They had only just got away from the Roman version of Diagon Alley – a bounty hunter nearly got them.

"I tell you Albus," Snape said, "I'm going to make Potter pay for this!" Dumbledore was having to do Snape's spellwork for him, the former Potions teacher having lost his wrist and hand when his Dark Mark exploded.

By coincidence, Harry and Hermione were visiting the same location – known as Pompeii Alley but had no idea their main Hogwarts enemies were there. They were informed earlier in the year that it was traditional for betrothed couples to take a two week holiday during the summer to give them a chance to ignite their love for each other away from familiar settings. They had decided to wait to see what happened involving Voldemort before deciding when to go.

Pompeii Alley looked like a perfect replica of the town in its heyday, just before its destruction by Mount Vesuvius. The branch of Gringotts was contained in a replica of the volcano which impressed Hermione.

Harry and Hermione also visited the real Pompeii and were amazed at how much it had been preserved by the eruption. Knowing who they were, a curator took them aside and told them that no magic was used to keep it preserved following its discovery, magic was mainly used as an alarm system to prevent looting.

The couple enjoyed their holiday and it achieved its purpose without the need for intimacy.

"Oh yes!" Draco Malfoy said. He was going through some paperwork he managed to obtain from the Ministry.

Later that day, Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom and Draco were standing next to each other as the marriage minister was starting his speech.

"I have something to say first." Draco said, "I need to be heard."

"It is most irregular, but if Draco wants to make his vows first, so be it."

"Alright – this whole thing is illegal!" Draco said. Everyone gasped.

"How is this illegal?" Fudge asked.

"The contract was supposedly signed by our legal guardians. However, I've discovered that Dumbledore is not Longbottom's legal guardian. That job is held by his grandmother, who was strangely committed to St. Mungo's at the same time as his parents. We all know Neville was taken in by Dumbledore but it was illegal since he did not file for custody. Therefore, Dumbledore had NO authority to sign a marriage contract for him, so this whole ceremony is illegal and I will have no part in it."

Minister Fudge turned to Percy Weasley. "Go and check the records." He said. Percy then disappeared and returned half-an-hour later and spoke to Fudge quietly.

"Mr. Malfoy's interpretation of the law is correct. Neville Longbottom's legal guardian is his grandmother Augusta Longbottom. Therefore, because Dumbledore broke the law by signing Neville up for this marriage, this ceremony is cancelled."

As soon as Fudge made that announcement, everyone began to leave, complaining about how their time had been wasted.

**WEASLEY – MALFOY – LONGBOTTOM WEDDING DECLARED ILLEGAL**

Yesterday, the social event of the year was held at the Burrow, residence of the Weasley family was declared illegal.

One of the grooms Draco Malfoy discovered that Albus Dumbledore signed Neville Longbottom up for marriage to both Mr. Malfoy and Mr. Ronald Weasley despite the fact he was not Mr. Longbottom's legal guardian.

Minister Fudge has announced that Dumbledore has been fined 100,000 galleons for filing a false declaration in order to file a legal document.

We at the Daily Prophet urge the Ministry to examine all documentation and guardianship issues before approving such marriages in future.

With a silent pop, Dumbledore and Snape appeared in Dubai. They chose this place as they knew it had no ties with magical England and chose well as there was no sign of any WANTED posters.

The two booked themselves into a very cheap hotel to rest for the night.

In the reception room of the hotel, two men were talking to the receptionist.

"So, these are the two men you just admitted?" the first man – called Roj Blake asked. He was showing a copy of the WANTED poster. The receptionist nodded. The second man tossed over a bag of gold which the receptionist pocketed.

"So, your intuition was right." Blake said.

"Vila suggested that we try countries which have no ties to magical England." The second man – known as Kerr Avon replied.

"Let's grab them and claim the reward." Blake continued. The two went to the room indicated by the receptionist and unlocked the door via magic. Before creeping into the room, they scanned for wards but found none. Then they crept into the room where Dumbledore and Snape were sleeping. Each man walked over to a single person, then before either Dumbledore and Snape could do anything, they activated a portkey.

As the two men collected their reward while Dumbledore and Snape were being moved into new accommodations (in other words – the maximum security basement cells of Azkaban), an Auror came by.

"How did you capture them?" the Auror asked – it was Tonks.

"Wouldn't you believe it – in a Dubai wizarding hotel and the idiots didn't even bother putting wards on their room!" Blake said.

"They must have thought no-one would think to look for them there." Avon continued.

"I believe there was a reason behind it – there is a rumour going about that either Dumbledore or Snape had a family vault located there." Tonks answered.

"Interesting." The first wizard said. Tonks didn't need 12 O's in her N.E.W.T's to know the two men were going to try something.

Fudge decided to hold Dumbledore and Snape's trials as soon as possible before they made another escape attempt. He made the sensible assumption that if Bellatrix Lestrange could escape the prison, escaping Azkaban would be child's play to Dumbledore. The two prisoners were brought in wearing magical suppression collars and chains and put in the chairs with further suppression chains on. Fudge was taking no chances.

Harry was there to give evidence against the two, especially over the love potions episode and Dumbledore's frequent attempts to send him to magic hating relations along with an attempt to set up an illegal betrothal with the niece of Amelia Bones.

The trial took hours – both pleaded not guilty. Lots of people gave evidence. Healers confirmed that Susan Bones had been subject to both the Imperious curse and memory charms, the magical signature of both belonging to Dumbledore. Both were given Veritaserum and both spilled their guts out, confirming their plans to take over and become the Enemy of the World.

In the end, both were found guilty and sentenced to the Dementor's Kiss, to be administered that very moment. Fudge decided to add charges against Molly Weasley as an accomplice to the attempted line theft against the Potters.

"One more thing?" Fudge asked, "How did Tom Riddle know about Horocruxes? I was under the belief that the details was restricted to those in the Department of Mysteries."

Dumbledore answered, hoping it would mean a lighter sentence. "I believe Horace Slughorn, who Tom was close too while at Hogwarts gave him the information."

To his shock, Dumbledore was kissed straight away followed by Snape. Fudge then authorised an arrest warrant for Horace

Slughorn for conspiracy to murder and providing forbidden dark information.

Harry looked relieved, that was one of the last major obstacles in his life dealt with. Now all he needed was for Death Eaters to be sent to prison.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

"Bring him in." Fudge said. A middle-aged balding man was brought in and placed in the center chair.

"You are Horace Slughorn, former Potions Master and Head of Slytherin House at Hogwarts?" Fudge asked. The man confirmed it. "According to the late Albus Dumbledore, you provided forbidden information about Horocruxes to Tom Riddle, later known as You-Know-Who."

Slughorn didn't answer. He had the look of shame on his face.

"Mr. Slughorn – you already face a lengthy sentence in Azkaban for providing this information," Fudge said, "If you co-operate and tell us what we want to know, then I will see to it that a light sentence is imposed."

"I can't." Slughorn said, sounding like he was going to cry.

"Minister, if I may." Harry said.

"The chair recognises Harry James Potter." Fudge said.

"I know Mr. Slughorn 'collected' people of interest in his time at Hogwarts. I'm sure my status will carry a lot of weight with him, give me a chance and I'll get the information from him."

"Very well." Fudge said, "You may try."

Harry approached Slughorn.

"You know who I am Mr. Slughorn?" Harry asked.

"Yes," Slughorn said, "You're Harry – Lily's boy. How could you not be with those eyes? I couldn't believe it when she married James Potter."

"I've read my mother's journals," Harry continued, "She thought very highly of you."

"I thought very highly of her too," Slughorn said, "I told her she would have been perfect in Slytherin. I got some really cheeky

answers from her in reply. I don't buy into all this 'purebloods are best, muggle-borns are useless' rubbish. Lily was the best student in her year."

"Years ago, at Hogwarts, Tom Riddle came to you and asked about Horocruxes. We know what he turned into those foul things including me. They have been destroyed and Tom eliminated."

"Impressive. I've never heard of a person being a Horocrux before." Slughorn said.

"Why don't you want to tell us what you told Tom Riddle?" Harry said.

"The shame of it. The thought of what he did thanks to this knowledge, the darkest magic known in our world. Lily would be ashamed of me if she knew. It's because of this I can't tell you." Slughorn answered.

"She would be ashamed of you if you didn't tell," Harry said, "You had no idea what he would do with that knowledge."

Slughorn started to cry. Harry bent down to him.

"Mr. Slughorn, what's done is done. If you hadn't said anything, who knows where he would have found the information?"

"He said it was for Defence Against the Dark Arts." Slughorn said.

"Horace," Harry said, "If my mother were here, she'd forgive you. You had no idea why he wanted to know about it. My betrothed is a Muggle-born, top of our year and if she heard about something and couldn't find any information about it, she would go to a teacher. On behalf of Lily Evans, I forgive you."

"Is there a Pensieve here?" Slughorn asked. Harry looked and Fudge nodded. Someone brought one over. Slughorn extracted the memory and put it in a vial. "Please don't think too badly of me."

The courtroom viewed the memory and saw the young Tom Riddle, which Harry recognised from his encounter with the memory in the Chamber of Secrets. They saw him ask Slughorn about the Horocruxes and there was an intense discussion about it.

"I've seen enough." Fudge said, "Horace Slughorn, for revealing information about forbidden dark items, I sentence you to..." but Harry stopped him.

"Minister," Harry said, "Mr. Slughorn may be many things but an accomplice to a Dark Lord is not one of them. Many people I've asked about him think very highly of him. He only left Hogwarts when Dumbledore fired him just so he could hire Snape to terrorise the students. May I suggest that Mr. Slughorn be sentenced to probation, the sentence to teach at Hogwarts as Potions Master and Head of Slytherin House for a fixed duration. From what I know, he went out of his way to discourage Death Eater recruitment and imposed heavy punishments on anti-Muggleborn slurs and refused to tolerate sabotage in his lessons, unlike Snape. As the heir of Gryffindor by blood and the heir to Slytherin by conquest, I can authorise such placements. If it will make you feel better, I will allow you to pick a representative to keep an eye on him, as long as it is not Delores Umbridge."

"What have you got against her Mr. Potter?" Fudge asked.

"She makes Snape's actions seem angelic. Since he started, Hogwarts has turned into a place which rivals a Nazi death camp with all sorts of action against Muggleborns just because of who they are. I want Hogwarts to get out of that cycle."

"Very well, if it is alright with you, I will appoint a trustworthy Auror to attend Hogwarts. I understand there is an opening for a new Defence teacher?" Fudge asked.

"Again, I'm sure McGonagall will accept your choice and if I put in a good word for him or her, they are bound to be hired." Harry answered.

"SHE DID WHAT?" Ginny Black shouted at her adoptive father.

"Narcissia Malfoy has asked me to arrange a marriage between you and Draco, now that the Malfoy family has gone downhill in wizarding circles." Sirius said.

"I refuse to marry that ponce!" Ginny said.



"If you calm yourself for a moment Ginvera," Sirius scolded, "I told her I would discuss things with you first then get back to you. I take it you don't want anything to do with him?"

"That's right," Ginny answered, "I want to marry someone of my own choice, not that anyone would want to marry me after that love potions episode."

"You don't need to worry about that," Sirius said, "Because it was established that you were acting under the Imperius curse and various compulsion charms, the entire episode has been expunged from your record."

"Thank you." Ginny said.

It was dinner time the following evening when Amelia Bones and her niece Susan came into the kitchen. To everyone's surprise (except for that of Remus, Tonks and Ginny), Sirius went up and gave Amelia a kiss on the lips.

"Is there something going on that we should know about?" Harry asked.

"Err, yes," Sirius said, "Amelia and I have been dating for the past eight months." Sirius said.

"And you didn't say anything, why?" Harry asked.

"I wanted to see if it was going anywhere before saying anything, then with everything that's been going on with Voldemort then Dumbledore, it got sidetracked."

"Well, Sirius needs someone to keep him under control. Madam Bones is the perfect person to do it. I'll forgive you this time." Harry said.

"Call me Amelia," Madam Bones said, "There's something you need to know Sirius."

"What's that?" Sirius asked.

"The house has been claimed by my brother and he's kicked myself and Susan out." She said, a bit scared to make her request.

"No problem," Sirius said, "You two can stay here as long as you want."

"Thank you Paddy." Amelia said, Sirius's face went red.

The following day, the latest Hogwarts letters were delivered. Badges fell out of the envelopes – Harry, Hermione and Susan had all made Prefect.

"There is something you should know about," Remus said, "McGonagall has rehired me as Defence professor. She muttered something about Fudge allowing it to keep in someone's good graces."

"Yeah, I had a word with Fudge," Harry said, "and assured him that out of our four years, you were the best. He did bring up your furry little problem, but I told him that when those nights occur, you would be in a safe house under the influence of Wolfsbane and there would be an assistant teacher to cover your lessons over the following couple of days."

What Harry didn't say was that in return, he would endorse Fudge in the upcoming elections. The Daily Prophet was reporting that his actions against Voldemort (his name not being printed in the paper), the upcoming Death Eater trials and the trials of Dumbledore and Snape were working in his favour.

Molly Weasley was fuming when Sirius wrote to her and told her that he would not consent to a betrothal between Ginny and Ron – she was going to get the chance to choose who she wanted to marry. Now that Ginny was a Black, it meant she had access to money and the thought of that turned Molly Weasley into one of her very greedy moods.

She had spent weeks looking through the paperwork about the Weasley-Longbottom-Malfoy wedding, trying to find a loophole. Grated, Neville Longbottom's participation was ruled illegal because Dumbledore lacked the authority to do so, but surely Ron and Draco's were legal, although faked, the contract had the signatures of their legal guardians. She may not have wanted Ron to marry a male, but the Malfoys had a lot of money. She had no way of

knowing, however, that the Malfoy money was being confiscated by the Ministry.

In the meantime, Draco Malfoy was looking outraged as he and his mother were standing in front of Sirius. Well, Narcissia was standing, Draco was kneeling down on one knee.

"I beg you cousin," Narcissia Malfoy was saying, "Please dissolve my marriage to Lucius before his trial so my son and I can continue our lives. The Ministry is confiscating all the Malfoy properties and money but I still have a vault with money your mother gave me when I came of age. None of which has been touched and Draco still has his trust fund. The Ministry has promised not to touch that, even though it was financed by Malfoy money."

Sirius pondered on things. "Very well. I, Lord Sirius Orion Black, Head of the House of Black hereby dissolve the marriage of Narcissia Black and Lucius Malfoy." He turned to Draco. "Stand up Draco."

The Slytherin prince did so. "As your head of house, only I can approve marriage applications and despite what I think of you, I will not approve a request by Molly Weasley to re-try the marriage between just you and Ronald Weasley. This is my one and only favour to you until you buck up your ideas."

"Thank you Lord Black." Draco said.

"There are conditions to you remaining in this family. For starters, you will never be the Heir to the House of Black, that title has gone to my daughter Ginny. Secondly, I am turning the reputation of House Black around. There will be no more calling Muggleborns by that foul word. You will work hard for your grades and you will not be bullying anyone. You will be permitted to retaliate in certain ways if someone bullies you. There will be no taunting of Remus Lupin, who is the new Defence teacher, over his condition. If you follow these conditions, I will give you a lump sum of 2 million galleons when you come of age and a Black property. If you do not, then I will cast you out of the family, do I make myself clear?" Sirius asked.

"Very clear Lord Black." Draco said, knowing he was beaten for now.

As usual, I don't own anything.

Apologies for the unbetaed chapter, but my beta reader is currently AWOL and I'm getting messages from people thinking that I'm abandoning my stories. Three of Eight is on temporary hiatus at the moment along with The Potter Family pending inspiration of good ideas. The latest chapter of The Apprentice is being written right now and there might be a one-shot treat in a week or two.

This is the final chapter of The Enemy of the World segment, the fifth year will begin in the next chapter.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

Hermione took Sirius aside a few days later.

"Sirius, this whole thing with Ginny confuses me – how can she be your heir since you adopted Harry after his parents died?" she asked.

"I couldn't name him my heir at the time since my parents were still alive and my mother in particular wouldn't have had any of it – I don't know how much Harry has told you but my family, with the exception of myself, Andromeda and Nymphadora have always been pro-Dark, including the pureblood is best opinion, they hated Muggleborns, half-bloods and blood traitors. I had always hoped to have children of my own someday but the longer it took for me to have my name cleared seemed to put paid to that. Until I blood-adopted Ginny and named her my heir, I had it in my will that Harry would be my heir, assuming I had no children of my own. I didn't want Lucius Malfoy being able to claim any of the money. I adopted Harry the normal way and made him my heir in a way, but he would need to be named in my will as heir. Because I blood-adopted Ginny, she is now automatically a Black and is legally my heir."

"Thank you – this was so confusing." Hermione said, "None of the books I've read go into it."

"A lot of the old houses keep rituals like this a secret so other houses can't steal them." Sirius said.

The Hogwarts letters arrived a few days later. There was an announcement in the letters that Divination was being dropped but

those on their OWL or final NEWT year could carry it on if they wanted. A new History of Magic book was on the list, McGonagall having had Binns exorcised.

Harry, Hermione and Susan all received Prefect badges.

"I bet you anything," Harry said, "That if Dumbledore was still at Hogwarts, he would have made sure Neville Longbottom was given the Prefect badge."

"I also bet," Hermione added, "that Ron Weasley will be expecting the badge too, mainly because all his brothers except for the twins have been Prefect and/or Head Boy."

Hermione was right. Ron and Molly Weasley were expecting a Prefect Badge to arrive, along with a Quidditch Captain badge, apparently promised to him by Dumbledore. When neither arrived and Ron's letter told him he was repeating the first year because of his bad marks, both went mad.

The following day, the two were attending a meeting at the education board, appealing the lack of badges and the having the repeat the first year.

"So Mr. Weasley," one wizard asked, "Why should you be named Prefect over Mr. Potter, who happens to be joint first in your year group?"

"Because I am a Pureblood," Ron said, "and I deserve it better than some pointless half-blood, even if he is the Boy-Who-Lived. Who did he buy the badge from anyway?"

"According to our records, you did the bare minimum required in class, your marks are averaging a P at best but you still make it through," the wizard said, "Accusing Headmistress McGonagall of accepting bribes is not acceptable. We've suspected Dumbledore of rigging both yours and Neville Longbottom's grades to keep you through but now he is dead, McGonagall can make you retake the first year if you like."

A witch stood up. "As for the Quidditch Captaincy, Dumbledore was exceeding his authority – to receive such a badge, you need to have

been on the team for at least three years. You have not even been on the team or even tried out."

The lead wizard stood up again, "Your appeal is thrown out. You will repeat the first year. You can refuse if you want but your wand will be snapped and your magic bound, memories modified and you will live out the rest of your life as a Muggle with Muggles."

Both Ron and Mrs. Weasley knew they were beaten.

The next day, the Potter/Black/Bones group went to Diagon Alley to buy the new items required for this year.

"I'm actually looking forward to Potions," Harry said, "Now that we don't have to put up with that greasy haired git."

"I agree with you there Harry," Susan said, "He would dock points from Hufflepuff for no reason what-so-ever." She had decided to drop Divination, believing it to be a whole load of rubbish, only taking it because her best friend was taking it.

After the shopping trip, Susan took Hermione aside.

"Do you think you could share Harry with me?" she asked, "I need a good boyfriend and Harry seems perfect, even though he is with you."

"Susan!" Hermione shouted, "Find your own boyfriend!"

The other girl went red.

"My daughter is now betrothed to Harry Potter," Mr. Granger said to Mrs. Weasley, who was at the Granger household to try and broker a marriage between Ron and Hermione. "Give me one reason why your son is better?"

"Harry Potter is very unsuitable for your daughter, when he was one year old, he MURDERED a person, killing him again a month ago. He is mentally unstable, living with a werewolf and a person who should be in Azkaban. Albus Dumbledore said that anyone who gets together with Potter is in grave danger." Mrs. Weasley said.

"Harry did not kill that Voldemort person, someone else did it. Talking about unsuitability, let's talk about your son. He tried to feed love potions to Harry and according to someone who read his mind, he was going to control your daughter's mind and repeatedly rape her. What's going to stop him from doing that to my daughter just because she is a Muggleborn and your son is some pathetic pureblood? Even if I wanted too, I can't break their betrothal. Now get out of my house before I call in your Aurors."

"You haven't heard the end of this – I will get my way, one way or the other."

"Tonks," Mr. Granger said, "I want to file a restraining order against the Weasley family with the exception of those twins." He explained the entire meeting to the group following the Diagon Alley trip.

"Can the betrothal be broken?" Hermione asked.

"Only if your father and I remove the rings from your's and Harry's fingers. Then Dumbledore's ritual might come back into play and force Harry and Susan together." Sirius said.

"I'll see what I can do about the restraining order," Tonks said, "The Minister, thankful that Harry secured him his new term in office might sign anything to keep him happy."

"I'm going to get us some dragonhide gloves." Harry said.

"Why?" everyone asked.

"I wouldn't put it past Molly Weasley to try a severing charm either on mine or Hermione's hand or finger with the ring on. Diffindo can't get past dragonhide." Harry answered and true to his word, he brought them a pair each and decided to wear them when they were out in public.

Cedric Diggory decided to pay a visit a few days later.

"I've not had a chance to see you before now," he said to Harry, "You did a good job in sorting out You-Know-Who – you deserve the title of Triwizard Champion."

"No, if anyone deserves it, it's you," Harry said, "I never wanted to be part of it. The only reason I tried to win was to win glory for Hogwarts. With you, you've not only won glory for Hogwarts, but I understand this is the first major glory for Hufflepuff in centuries. Tell me, what do you plan to do with the prize money?"

"Buy Cho an engagement ring, put in a deposit on a home and invest the rest. Dad doesn't make a lot of money in his Ministry job, our tickets to the Quidditch World Cup Final cost him three months wages." Cedric said.

"I know of a good investment opportunity. The Weasley Twins are planning to set up a joke shop but need finance to help them get a premises and certain supplies to help them get started." Harry said.

"I've seen their pranks and stuff in school, some of it is really impressive." Cedric replied.

"Sirius is going to give them a start-up capital of 2,000 galleons and I'm going to give them 1,000 galleons too. We're doing this so we can make sure nothing too dangerous gets out there."

Sirius and Harry called Fred and George Weasley over to the house a few days later to present them with the money to go big with Weasley's Wizarding Wheezes.

"All I ask," Sirius said, "is to see what you're going to bring out and maybe give you a pointer or two."

"Thank you." Fred said, "One thing we can do for you is to warn you – Mum plans to split Harry and Hermione up somehow so be warned. She's actually got that git Percy checking the legal side of your betrothment."

"Thanks for the warning." Harry said. Fred and George left soon afterwards. "I don't believe that woman! Is there anything we can do about it?"

"I'll have to ask Amelia about it," Sirius said, "Talking of Amelia, I'm thinking of asking her to marry me – what do you think?"

"That'll be great if you do. It's about time you got married." Harry said.



"We were close at Hogwarts, but fell apart during the war. I hoped to reconcile with her afterwards, but of course, having to go into hiding ruined those plans." Sirius said.

"Sorry about that," Harry said, feeling guilty, thinking that because of him, Sirius hadn't gotten married and started a family of his own.

"Don't be," Sirius said, "You were worth it – I'd rather miss out on a wife and family if it kept you away from Petunia and Vernon."

That evening, Sirius proposed to a red faced Amelia Bones in front of the entire household and she accepted. The following day, she and Sirius made formal applications for the adoption of Susan.

The engagement made the papers the following day. Rita Skeeter had somehow found out and leaked it. Molly Weasley looked at the paper with interest. She had greedy thoughts in her eyes – propose an arranged marriage between Ron and Susan, make up some lies about her after the wedding then demand a divorce and as a settlement 'request' most of the Black fortune. She would also invoke a rarely used Pureblood law to force the arrangement to take place.

Meanwhile, Amelia Bones was in a private meeting with Andromeda Tonks.

"I want Flora Dursley released from Azkaban," Andromeda said, "that prison is no place for a young girl and according to the records, her only crime is meeting an escaped prisoner at a place where Dumbledore dumped her with the help of memory charms. Yes, I know she was part of a conspiracy, but being raised in the Muggle world, she won't know anything about You-Know-Who, Azkaban or Bellatrix Lestrange. As her aunt, I feel I'm the most suitable person to raise her. I will be taking up the History of Magic teaching job at Hogwarts this year and so can keep an eye on her. Minerva McGonagall has agreed that she can come back considering she has not committed any crimes."

Amelia arranged for Flora's release that afternoon, arguing with Fudge that being the daughter of Bellatrix Lestrange was not a crime no matter what crimes her mother had committed.

Please review, with thanks to those who do

Following the backlash against the old Chapters 30 and 31, I rewrote these chapters to remove the harem implications but some stuff from the original version has been retained.

## Chapter Thirty

### The Lost Potter

Andromeda Tonks took Flora aside upon her release from prison.

"You should not have been taken to prison considering all you did was talk to an escaped felon, having been raised in the Muggle world. I accept the fact that anything you did during the previous year was under the influence of the Imperious curse. I've spoken to McGonagall and she will allow you to continue at Hogwarts, although you will repeat the first year and be resorted." Andromeda said, "This is a rare second chance not many people get unless they have the money and use the words Imperious Curse although in your case, it has been proved that you were under the influence of it."

"Thank you Auntie." Flora said.

Things at the Weasley household were going from bad to worse. Molly Weasley had just discovered that her sons were going to open a joke shop following their final year of school and they had secured investment from Sirius Black and Harry Potter.

"You are not opening a joke shop!" she shouted at them, "You are going to get respectable jobs at the Ministry!"

"We don't want to work for the Ministry." Fred said, "Bill and Charley are doing what they want to do so we're going to do the same."

"You will give me that money Black and Potter gave you - I will not allow it to be used in this way." She ordered.

"No Mother," George said, "It was given to us to invest in our shop. Why can't you be supportive of something anyone that isn't Percy wants to do?"

"I will not stand by and allow my sons to ruin their lives by opening a shop!" she shouted.

"It's our choice, not yours. We're of age." Fred said, "You can't stop us."

In the end, the twins stormed out and spent the rest of the summer with Angelina Johnson, whose father allowed them to stay seeing there were only a couple of days to go before school restarted and Fred and Angelina had promised not to get up to no good.

In the meantime, Percy had been checking up on the legal side of Harry and Hermione's betrothment in case the request for a contract between Ron and Susan was rejected.

"I'm afraid it's perfectly legal Mother," he said, "It was approved by both their legal guardians. I've read up on all the laws and Muggle guardians are entitled to approve bethroments. If you try anything to stop it, then Sirius Black, being Potter's guardian is legally entitled to have you killed."

The Weasley family arrived at the Black house a week before the holidays ended. Molly Weasley had coerced her husband to speak for the family.

"I would like to arrange a marriage between my son Ron and your niece Susan." Arthur said, "I am prepared to invoke Section 26 Paragraph 3 of the Marriage Act to make this happen."

"I'm sorry Arthur," Sirius said, "As of yesterday, a marriage has been negotiated between Susan and a suitor whose name will be kept secret until their wedding day."

"You can't do that!" Molly Weasley shouted, forgetting her place, "Section 26 Paragraph 3 allows this to happen."

"As it happens," Amelia said, "A contract has already been agreed upon based on a person of Susan's choice."

"She can't choose!" Molly shouted again, "A parent or guardian must choose for them."

"Actually, that was last century. In 1922, the law was changed allowing a child to choose their life partner and for a parent or guardian to arrange a contract to that effect."

Molly Weasley stormed off with Ron behind her and Arthur giving an apologetic look.

Susan woke up on August 22nd, which was her 15th birthday. She made her way down to the dining room where breakfast was being served. Following breakfast, the family made their way to the living room where presents were waiting for her.

From Harry, she received a book entitled Congo by the Muggle writer Michael Crichton. He knew she was a big fan of his books and knew she didn't have that one. Amelia Bones refused to allow her to have the book Disclosure because of its sexually explicit nature. Hermione got her The Great Train Robbery by the same writer, editions of the book being hard to find. From Ginny, she received a limited edition version of Jurassic Park on videotape, Muggle appliances working in the household.

Upon watching the videotape, both Ginny and Susan were impressed at what the Muggles could do with regards to their entertainment.

Before long, it was time to return to Hogwarts for the fifth year. Harry and Hermione put on their clothes complete with dragon-hide gloves to prevent any trouble. Sirius and Amelia Bones took the group to Kings' Cross where they awaited trouble, but there was none.

Arthur Weasley walked up to the group. "I must apologise for Molly's actions. For years, Dumbledore had her brainwashed into believing Harry and Ginny were going to marry and it would help him and my family make money. Disowning Ginny was a sham, Dumbledore expected Harry to talk us out of it. Ginny seems more happier now, with your family. I give you my word that you will have no more trouble with the Weasley family."

"Thank you." Sirius said, not really believing Arthur's tale. The group boarded the train and as it began its journey, Harry, Hermione and Susan went to the Prefect's meeting. As Harry knew, Cedric Diggory was the Head Boy and Angelina Johnson of the Gryffindor Quidditch Team was Head Girl.

Ron in the meantime was trying to find someone to sit with. Ever since the sham marriage attempt, he decided to keep as far away

from Neville as possible, not knowing Neville was not returning to Hogwarts.

"You can sit here if you like." Flora Black said (she refused to take the Tonks or Lestrangle names so Sirius let her use the Black name). Ron sat next to her and they spent the journey talking to each other.

During the ride on the train, Harry and Hermione stopped people bullying Ron over him having to start the first year again. The other prefects didn't but they said that as Prefects, they had to set an example, no matter how much a person deserved it.

"Leave him alone!" Flora shouted at one group.

"Look here, Weasley's got a girlfriend!" one of the bullies said and Ron went bright red.

The sorting went off without a hitch. Flora was resorted into Gryffindor. Harry later found out that Neville Longbottom had been taken out of Hogwarts by his grandmother upon finding out about his abysmal marks and behaviour – he was now being home-schooled.

"I have a number of new appointments to announce," McGonagall said, "Professor Lupin has consented to return as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Sirius Black will deputise for him during the full moon, during which, Professor Lupin will be in a safe house under the influence of Wolfsbane. They will also share the title of Head of Gryffindor House. Horace Slughorn, who was fired by Dumbledore in favour of Severus Snape, has agreed to return as Potions Professor, along with Head of Slytherin. Andromeda Tonks is our new History of Magic teacher and Divination lessons are cancelled.

"There are going to be a number of changes now I am in charge. The Forbidden Forest is forbidden for a reason – it is for this reason and the fact that our gamekeeper Hagrid has to keep chasing certain people out of it (she paid particular attention to the Weasley twins), it will now be fenced off. Only myself and Hagrid will be able to open the main gate to the forest, anyone attempting to break the charms on the gate, will lose their house 50 points.

"If I remember correctly, a couple of Quidditch teams are in need of new members, please put forward your name to your Head of House

who will pass it onto your respective team captains who will assign try-outs. I am authorising the creation of reserve teams in the event of injuries and finally, unfair bookings of the Quidditch pitch, in order to prevent an opposition team to train will be forbidden."

Meanwhile, at an archaeological site in Belgium, a man was digging around a newly discovered trench system. He along with others were looking for previously undiscovered World War I trenches. He saw a glint of metal and dug towards it. Ten minutes later, he picked it up. It was very dirty so he put into a small bowl of water and scrubbed it until the dirt came off. It was a pair of corpse tickets with the following text on it: H POTTER. ROYAL WESTSHIRES. 43361. Digging a bit more, he found a bag with the same name on. He tried to open it but it seemed to be stuck. He decided to trace H Potter's surviving decendants when he returned to England. Unlike some people, he believed in returning discovered property to people's relatives. Had the archaeologist dug further, he wouldn't have believed the sight that would have greeted him.

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